
THE SNARE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

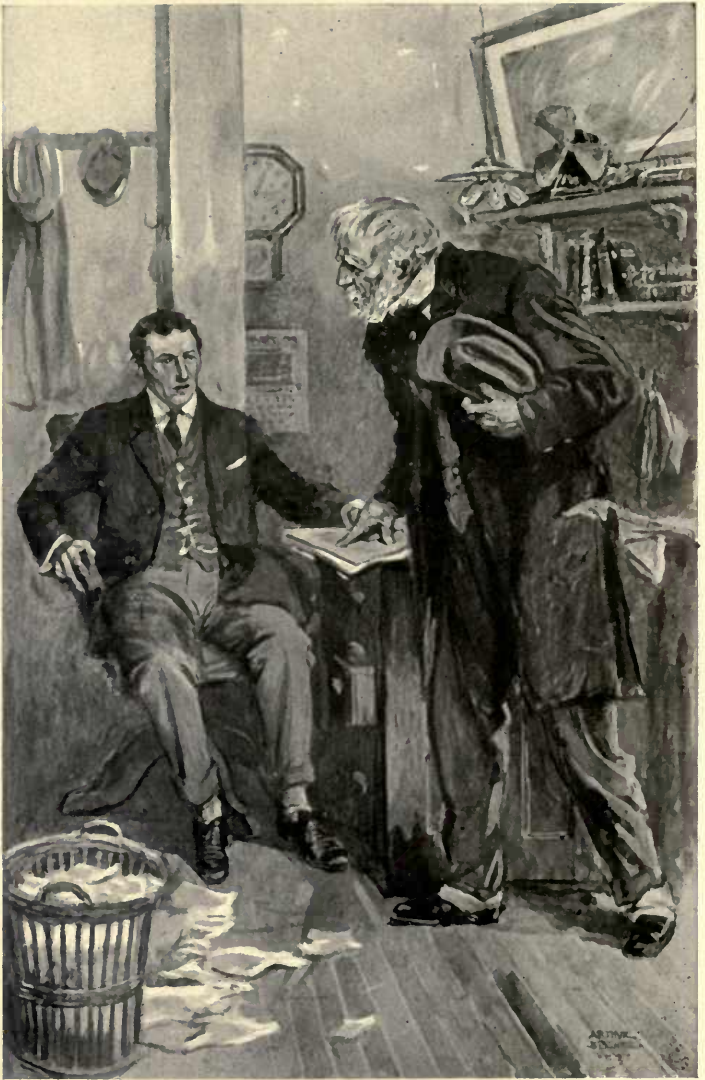
EDITH · E · BUCKLEY



Good Mystery story
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THE SNARE OF CIRCUMSTANCE



“‘Then this was written for effect!’ the stranger cried sharply.”
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 4.*

THE SNARE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

BY
EDITH E. BUCKLEY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ARTHUR E. BECHER

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ILLUSTRATIONS

- “ ‘Then this was written for effect !’ the stranger
cried sharply ” *Frontispiece*
- “ I had dismounted and held before her the
locket ” *Page 93*
- “ ‘And now for this last paper,’ I said, opening
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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The first illustration is a portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and facing slightly to the right. He is wearing a bicorne hat and a high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light color.
2. The second illustration is a portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and facing slightly to the left. He is wearing a bicorne hat and a high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light color.
3. The third illustration is a portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and facing slightly to the right. He is wearing a bicorne hat and a high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light color.
4. The fourth illustration is a portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and facing slightly to the left. He is wearing a bicorne hat and a high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light color.
5. The fifth illustration is a portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and facing slightly to the right. He is wearing a bicorne hat and a high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light color.

THE SNARE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

CHAPTER I

EXTRAORDINARY OFFER OF A QUEER OLD MAN

“**E**VERY man is the architect of his own fortunes” was so carefully impressed upon my youthful mind, that manhood was reached before I came to understand that a literal acceptance of that saying is a mistake. It was my connection with the Somhers mystery that completed my conversion to a belief in cause and effect, and made me a respecter of the potency of circumstance.

I had known Mr. Peter Somhers from my childhood. It was natural, therefore, when the old gentleman was mysteriously murdered, that I should seek the assignment to visit the scene of the crime and do the “special” for the *Sphere*, that great New York daily on which I had won my spurs as a “star” reporter. But my chief had other plans for me, and before the man who was detailed to that case reached the New England village where the murder was done, I was well out past Sandy Hook on my way to Paris on a commission to which I had long looked forward.

My interest in the Somhers case was not, however, weakened by my sudden good fortune, and I spent

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the greater part of the first day out in reading accounts of the crime as given by the various papers that I had taken aboard, and in an endeavor to put into logical form the contradictory evidence presented.

From the first, the responsibility for the deed pointed to Harrison Milbrath, a young nephew of the victim, whose home had been with Mr. Somhers, and I was not surprised, upon landing, to learn that he had been arrested, charged with the crime. To my mind the case against him weakened steadily as details came to hand, and I was not only astonished, but mystified, that his trial could end as it did in a verdict of "guilty." The case was appealed, and although, as before, the sentiment of the press was against the lad, he was acquitted by the second jury.

I had never known Milbrath, and I felt no more interest in him than I should have felt for any person in his position, but I must say that his case touched a chord of sympathy, or something akin to it, in my breast. I was glad of his acquittal, for I believed in his innocence.

I returned to America in time to take in the last day of the second trial, and I went back to town with a far deeper feeling for the young man than I had any desire to possess. His haunted eyes and sensitive lips touched even my sensibilities, hardened as they were, through years of newspaper training.

To my report of the conclusion of the trial, therefore, I appended a brief analysis of the case, which tended logically to Milbrath's advantage, and added

an urgent plea for a more friendly attitude toward him who, though acquitted by twelve men, was not fully exonerated until public sentiment extended the right hand of good-fellowship. This sympathetic monograph was freely blue-penciled by my chief, but enough of it remained to attract the attention of at least one person and, as a consequence, to alter the trend of my whole career.

One day, about six months later, as I sat at my table running out some copy, the door to our chief's sanctum opened and there emerged with him an odd-looking, bent-shouldered elderly man. Following the chief's indication he started toward me with quick, nervous strides, but as I turned he stopped short, wavered an instant as if he would turn back, then continued to come forward, but slowly, with dragging steps.

"Mr. Bliss?" he asked, and his eyes searched mine until I could believe that he read my thoughts.

I answered affirmatively, and impressed by his sudden feebleness offered him my chair; but he declined it with an irritated motion of his whole body.

"Your editor tells me that you wrote this," and he handed me a copy of my analysis of the Somhers mystery, "and I want you to undertake an investigation for me — reopen the case, as it were, privately."

"With a view to detecting the murderer of Mr. Somhers?"

"To be sure."

"I fear that such an effort on my part would be wasted time. Two years is a good while, and every

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chance of getting at the right clue may be lost by now."

"Then this was written for effect!" the stranger cried sharply, putting his forefinger on that part of the article — which I still held — in which I developed by deduction the theory that the crime had been committed by an elderly or infirm man, instead of by one young and athletic like Harrison Milbrath.

"No," I answered. "I can stand by that; but my theory ends there, and as now I can have none of the advantages that come with being upon the spot immediately after a crime to help me in my work, I think I should be unwise to undertake such an investigation. Besides, I believe that Mr. Milbrath already has had some of the best detective skill in the country at work upon the case."

"Do you *know* that?"

"I had it on excellent authority."

The old man appeared to meditate, and as I looked at him I could not doubt that the alternate clutch and release of his fingers on the side of my desk, and the swift twitching of the muscles of his face indicated a fierce mental conflict of some kind — an effort to control anger, it seemed to me.

"Bah!" he roared presently, his voice vibrant, "And what will they do? Take his money, encourage him with false clues, and, finally, declare the puzzle insoluble, a closed book, as is every case where the story has once been told. Bah!"

"Then how can you hope that I could succeed? I, who have only a journalist's experience to measure against the training of ——"

"There you are!" the old man interrupted, stamping his foot. "There you are! Like all young fools. Never to know your best gifts and so to slight them. Talk about your experience measured against that of a professional detective! Bah! How many detectives concern themselves about the hair-line of accuracy? How many professional detectives analyze? How many are capable of deducing a proposition without forestalling a conclusion, as you have done in that clipping? Now can you understand why it is *you* that I want for the work?"

I thought that he had made the matter fairly clear. I did not, however, feel disposed to consider his offer.

"I am very well satisfied with my present position," I ventured.

"Bah! And what will it lead you to? An editor's chair some time, perhaps, and a life's work for an amount of money that I will give you in a year — or in a month, if you succeed. *Now* will you listen?"

I glanced at my watch.

"I am pressed for time at this hour," I said. "Is it agreeable to you to appoint a later time when we can discuss the matter more at our leisure?"

"At *your* leisure, you mean," he cried rudely. "No; it must be now or not at all. *You* pressed for time! A life of time is before you, while I — Bah! I, too, am pressed for time. I have come a long way to see you and I must be getting back."

That I was dealing with a crank — or worse — I had small doubt. But, as he intimated, it might

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be wiser to hear him out. I therefore offered him a chair, which the old man this time made no objection to taking, and prepared to listen to him.

He was affable and concise when it became a matter of exact business. His name, he said, was Philander Summerfield, and he was a cosmopolite — now in Europe, in the Orient, or in America, as the fancy seized him. At that time his headquarters were in Boston. All he demanded of me was that I give up all other work and devote my best energies to a study of the Sommers mystery. He would restrict me in no course that I saw fit to pursue, and any reasonable amount of money necessary to carry on the work should be promptly forthcoming. He required, however, a semi-weekly report of my progress, and an itemized account of my expenditures in the interest of the case, “as a matter of curiosity,” he added. In consideration of these offices on my part he would pay me a salary.

“What are you making now?” he asked abruptly.

I told him.

“I will increase it by ten a week, and when you succeed in bringing the criminal to justice twenty thousand dollars shall be yours.”

“Twenty thousand!” I gasped, for half that amount would have been an inducement.

“Twenty thousand!” Mr. Summerfield repeated with evident satisfaction. “And there is one point that I would suggest. I should be glad to have you make the acquaintance of young Milbrath and be actuated by as much friendliness and sympathy

for him as, consistently, you can feel. Do not fancy that I have any personal interest in the young man," he continued, in an altered tone, as if answering the question that sprang to my lips and was suppressed. "We have no acquaintance, nor does he know that I exist. Indeed, I will retract that request. Pay no attention to Milbrath so far as I am concerned. What do I care about him?" and Mr. Summerfield's eyes gleamed angrily. "Did he not get the deserts of a headstrong, willful lad? No; he may yet hang for all me!"

"Then may I ask why you are trying to clear his name?"

"Clear his name? *I* clear his name? Oh, ho! young man. You are not so sharp-witted as I judged you to be. *I* help Harrison Milbrath? You mistake my purpose. I seek the truth — for truth's sake. Why not? Or better, since I observe that you doubt that statement, to satisfy a curiosity — to settle a theory of my own, perhaps." He paused and eyed me shrewdly.

"I am — peculiar," he continued presently, with a flicker of a smile; "'eccentric,' some express it. I have sufficient means to enjoy that privilege. I am interested in this case solely from motives that could not, probably, actuate you, and I am prevented from engaging in a personal investigation of it for good and sufficient reasons. Now what do you think of my offer?"

"It is a most liberal one," I said, and paused as the strangeness of the situation flashed over me. What did I know of this man? Only the little that

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he had chosen to tell me. And what proof had I of the truth of that?

"Well, well," Mr. Summerfield cried impatiently, and as if he read my thoughts. "Of course you do not know me. How do you know that I am not a crank, or worse,—a madman—the murderer himself? Ah, ha! That is not a bad joke, is it? To put you on my own track, as it were," and he doubled over with mirthless laughter, and then pulled himself to soberness as suddenly as he had interrupted himself. "Yes; I assure you that I am—ah—'eccentric.' But, my young man, you need not hesitate on that account. I am prepared to deposit in trust twenty thousand dollars to be made payable to you as soon as you have met the conditions of this simple contract. As for references as to my reliability, call up the First National Bank of Boston and ask whether Philander Summerfield is good for twenty thousand dollars. That is as much as you need to know about me."

I acted upon Mr. Summerfield's suggestion. The result was satisfactory to me, yet I could not bring myself to sign the contract which Mr. Summerfield produced, though it set forth nothing that he had not mentioned.

With a quickness that seemed to be characteristic, Mr. Summerfield read my indecision.

"Well," he said irritably, "you reach conclusions slowly."

"I should like a day in which to consider your extraordinary offer," I answered.

"A day? Not an hour! Have I not told you that I am in haste to be off? Now is your opportunity to make the foundation of a fortune if you are clever, but your decision must be at once — at once, sir!"

To the winds went my native caution. When again would an opportunity to make twenty thousand dollars in congenial work be flung at my feet? And if I failed? Well, the *Sphere* would still, no doubt, be issued.

Half an hour later Mr. Philander Summerfield and I parted company — forever, as it proved. I carried in my pocket a concisely worded contract which bound me to his interests, therein specified, for one year, if that length of time were required to work out my case, and my thoughts were full of the peculiarities of my new acquaintance and of the curious change that circumstance had made in my life; for, up to an hour earlier, criminal investigation was the last profession to which my fancy would have turned.

CHAPTER II

MURRAY KILBOURNE AND THE MAN WHO WAS HELD

A FEW hours later I severed my connection with the *Sphere*, and seven o'clock that evening found me at the Reform Club dining vis-à-vis with Murray Kilbourne, whom I had wired to meet me there and help me celebrate.

What I had to tell him of my morning visitor and his extraordinary offer turned him green, figuratively speaking, for while a successful journalist and an author of whom the world was beginning to take cognizance, Murray Kilbourne was by predilection a sleuth of no mean ability. Indeed, criminal detection had been the profession to which he turned naturally upon leaving college. But he had abandoned the field after a year of work, to accept a small fortune left to him by an uncle on condition that he devote his entire energies to the cultivation of his literary talent—a wise stipulation, it seemed to me; for, in spite of Kilbourne's ability, his delicate health and periods of constitutional lassitude, when he abhorred concentrated thought or action, would, in all likelihood, have kept him always in the ranks of the little known.

"By Jove! Bliss," he cried enviously. "You're a lucky dog. When do you enter upon your new career?"

"I'm in it now," I laughed. "Dining like a Tammany chief will henceforth be one of the features of my increased salary. Stick to me, Murray, and you'll not starve. What do you think of the old fellow?"

"Summerfield? Oh, a monomaniac, no doubt; or, perhaps, a philanthropist who saw in you a fit subject for a lift."

"I like that! Have a care or you'll not be asked to my country place this summer."

"So! Where may I go if I'm proper?"

"To Overlook, in Winton, a New England village just over the line from Connecticut where the old man Sommers lived and met his end — that is if I'm successful in getting the place for a time. I saw it advertised for sale or for rent the other day. Know the place?" for Kilbourne was frowning reflectively.

"The name seems to be associated in my mind, though I can't tell how. It may come to me presently. So you plan to go there?"

"Probably I shall want the place for only a short time, while I put myself into humor with the conditions that prevailed there at the time of the tragedy — a month, perhaps, if I can get it. Harrison Milbrath can doubtless settle that point for me."

"The nephew who was charged with the crime? I'm not familiar with that case. What were the leading features of it?"

"Why, the old man was found dead in his library, lying on a couch, an ugly bruise above his left

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temple, but no other marks of violence in evidence. The physicians and police decided that the wound was caused by a blow from a blunt instrument, which, by the way, was never found. It was evident enough that he had not been killed while on the couch, for there was not a drop of blood on anything except upon the body and clothes. A curious feature of the affair, too, was that a piece of oilcloth that no one seemed able to identify had been put under the old man's head, as if to save the couch."

"A considerate criminal," commented Kilbourne with a smile.

"But another proof that the body was taken to the couch some little time after the murder was the fact that there was not a stain upon the oilcloth. The blood of the victim had had time to congeal, you see."

Kilbourne nodded.

"Well, the nephew, Harrison Milbrath, who had lived with Mr. Somhers for twelve years or more, seemed to be the only person on earth with whom Mr. Somhers ever had trouble, or who would profit largely by his death, so, naturally, suspicion pointed to him. Moreover, it was proved that on the very day of the tragedy uncle and nephew had indulged in a fierce disagreement, after which Milbrath left the house with an expression anything but pleasant on his face. No one in the household, which consisted of only a maid and a cook, besides the two men (for Mr. Somhers was a widower), saw the young man again until the day after the

tragedy, when he returned from Boston, where he swore that he had been for eighteen hours. But there were witnesses who took their oath that he was on the road between Winton and Overlook, a mile out of the village, walking toward home, within the time the physicians testified that Mr. Somhers must have died. Unfortunately he did n't prove his alibi, and he was found guilty. At a second trial, however, an eminently respectable and well-known man — seems to me it was a clergyman — testified that Milbrath was with him in Boston at the time of the tragedy. That seemed to settle the matter in the minds of the jury, for they returned a verdict of acquittal."

"Hum!" meditated Kilbourne, toying with his oyster fork. "Did no one else come under the shadow of suspicion?"

"Never a soul, so far as I know. The servants swore that no one called at the house that day, not even a tradesman. Besides, Mr. Somhers was more or less of a recluse and had no enemies."

"Who found the body?"

"One of the servants who went to announce dinner. I believe it was the housemaid."

"An interesting case," commented Kilbourne. "Say, but you are lucky, Bliss!" Then, after a moment's pause: "Did young Milbrath profit largely by his uncle's death?"

"To the tune of something like a million, I believe."

"A pretty penny for a rainy day, hey? Where is he now?"

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"On his way here, I hope. I traced him through his attorneys and sent a messenger to the Oriental, at Manhattan Beach, where he is stopping, with a hint of my purpose and an invitation to join us here at dinner."

"I assume that he declined?"

"He answered that he would meet us later — in the parlors at nine o'clock. He may be able to lend me a hand somehow. I fancy that I'll need all the help that comes my way, for in two years every clue not obvious may be lost."

"Humph!" sniffed Kilbourne contemptuously. "A fine, faint-hearted lad you are! Two years, indeed! If ever there was a true clue face upward, it is there yet."

"Well, if two years does n't seem long to you, it does to me," I answered, with an assumption of his own superiority. "The die is cast, however. I'll make that twenty thousand dollars if any skill of mine avails."

Kilbourne shrugged his wide, gaunt shoulders.

"Let me see your contract," he said.

I produced it. He studied it for a minute, and handed it back.

"This Summerfield came prepared to secure your services, evidently, notwithstanding the fact that he did not know your name."

"You infer that from the fact that my name is penned in the space left for a name?"

Kilbourne nodded.

"Well, he did not know, either, what salary he'd have to pay, as doubtless you've likewise observed.

No matter what my personality, position, or ability, I was to be pressed into his service. A very confident old man, it seems to me — and all because I chanced to write a few lines that pleased him!”

“So it appears. But it would interest me to know his reason for assuming a handwriting, this Mr. Philander Summerfield, the cosmopolite.”

“His handwriting assumed! What evidence have you?” and I hastily unfolded the sheet to see for myself.

Kilbourne put up his hand to hide a yawn.

“Elmer,” he said, with languid amusement. “You are so clever! By Jove! You fairly scintillate! Even you, if you look carefully, will be able to detect a difference between the signature and the parts so neatly and so painstakingly filled in by hand. Yet they were undoubtedly done by the same person.”

“Unquestionably, for I saw both written; and though the difference, except in the size of the letters, did not impress me at the time, I see now that even their formation differs somewhat.”

“Precisely. It takes considerable rubbing to polish your power of observation, as I learned long ago, but it will polish.”

“Thank you! It is comforting to know that I am not hopeless. But Kilbourne, I recognize my limitations, and I’ve got to have you at the helm. It was, indeed, the remembrance of you that turned the balance of decision when the old man pressed me.”

Kilbourne’s pale, thin face became tinged with

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color about the high cheek bones, and he lifted his deep-set dark eyes in one penetrating glance. I knew his susceptibility to flattery in the matter of his detective skill, but I was not making use of my knowledge, as he saw.

"There! There!" he demurred, but with a pleased smile. "By the way, it has just come to me about Winton. Mr. McClure lives there, if I'm not mistaken. No; you don't know Mr. McClure, probably, unless by name. He's a good deal of a scientist in his line — an authority, I believe, on the birds of New England, which he writes about. I met him on the steamer coming home four years ago, and I was never so fascinated by a man of his years before, or since. I'll give you a card to him. Whether he remembers me or not, I'm sure he'll make you glad that you met him. Ah! What is this?"

It was Harrison Milbrath's card; and as we did not linger over the final touches of our dinner we were soon standing before the young man.

He was a huge fellow, quite as broad and taller, even, than Kilbourne, who stood six feet one in his stockings. But Kilbourne was gaunt to attenuation, angular and aquiline, and Milbrath possessed a sleek fullness, athletic, however, rather than voluptuous.

He acknowledged my greeting and the introduction to Kilbourne with grave dignity, odd in contrast to the boyish face, which a soft beard did not mature, and his alert movements. There was the same reflection of pain in his candid eyes, and of

contained sensitiveness about his well-shaped lips that had impressed me when first I saw him.

"Your note, Mr. Bliss," he said when, after a few pleasantries, we found ourselves, with lighted cigars, upon a divan, "your note referred to a stranger who has engaged you to investigate the mystery of my uncle's death. May I know the name of this friend?"

"Philander Summerfield."

Milbrath repeated the name reflectively and shook his head.

"I never heard of him."

"He said that he was unknown to you."

"Elderly?"

"Quite so; past sixty, I should say."

"A friend of my uncle's, no doubt."

"On the contrary he took pains to explain that his motive in having the case investigated was actuated by nothing more lofty than curiosity. He appears to have formed some theory which he wishes proved, or disproved."

"Um! Do you think that he suspects some one?"

"That idea came to me, but I rejected it when he offered me twenty thousand dollars to solve the mystery and produce my man."

"Twenty thousand dollars! He pays well for gratified curiosity. It would be interesting to know Mr. Summerfield, if he is as original in everything."

"He at least possesses the faculty of keeping one guessing."

Milbrath puffed at his cigar for a moment in thoughtful silence.

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I glanced at Kilbourne, who faced us in a high-back chair. Between his almost closed eyelids he was regarding Milbrath with steady scrutiny, and I knew that when he turned away he would have formed an opinion of the young man that in all probability he would never change. But his silence made me apprehensive, for I knew from experience that silence in Kilbourne foreboded antipathy or antagonism. I had faith that his analysis of Milbrath's character would be unprejudiced and practically unerring; but I knew, also, that he was given to personal dislikes founded, as he was frank enough to admit, on nothing more reliable than intuition, which would utterly destroy his interest in a person or a case; and I felt that I should be lost without Kilbourne's counsel in this new work.

I explained to Milbrath that I had accepted Mr. Summerfield's proposition because he had insisted on an immediate decision, "but," I added, "I have no intention of doing anything without your permission; that was one of the stipulations of my agreement with him."

Milbrath shot at me a glance of surprise and question.

"My permission?" he repeated, and smiled. "It had not occurred to me that my permission was necessary. You are good to put it that way, and of course you have it. Go ahead in your own way and count upon me for any assistance I can give. Shall you wish to visit Overlook?"

"That will doubtless be the best beginning. I

should like to go there, however, not as a detective, but as a tenant, if I can arrange terms."

"That point need not trouble you. You are welcome to use the place indefinitely. The property is in the hands of an agent, but I will see that he understands the situation. When will you care to go out?"

"To-morrow if I may."

"So soon? Then I will give you a note to Mr. Arms, the farmer, who is also caretaker of the grounds. The house, you understand, is closed and deserted. Perhaps you would be more comfortable at the farm. Mrs. Arms has taken a summer boarder before now. In that way you would have the run of the place without the inconvenience of keeping it up."

"That feature has no terror for me. Mine will be a bachelor establishment, and I know a Frenchman who will jump at the chance of going out with me as general factotum. Besides, I think that I should be freer at the villa."

"That is possible. The Wintonites are a simple-hearted, hospitable folk, distinctively rural in type, and ready enough to take a stranger into their circle, unless, indeed, a connection with 'The Place of Silence,' as I hear they have come to call Overlook, stands in the way. Excuse me for a moment and I will write an introduction to Mr. Arms."

He turned to a writing table at his elbow and penned a few lines, which he handed to me.

"This note should provide every convenience for you and your work at Overlook," he said. "But

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if anything is lacking, please let me know what it is. I have engaged passage on the *Umbria* which sails a week from to-morrow, but if I can help you by remaining I will cancel my booking."

"That seems hardly necessary, thank you. Still if you can arrange to be with me while you are here it would be very helpful."

An expression of acute pain flashed across Milbrath's mobile face, and he shook his head.

"Anywhere but in Winton," he said sadly. "The townspeople still hold me guilty — they look askance at me, at least."

"But you were acquitted."

"True — afterward. I tell you, Mr. Bliss, a man who has done a crime may be satisfied to get free with his life, but one without guilt who has been held and convicted, then freed, will carry a stain on his name and a blight on his happiness just so long as the real criminal remains undetected. Good God! You cannot understand it. No one who has not been through it can know what it means to have a free conscience, and yet realize that wherever his name precedes him there are some to look at him with distrustful eyes, believing that the court erred in giving him his freedom."

Milbrath spoke rapidly and with dramatic intensity. I stretched out my hand and touched his arm.

"We are going to find the real criminal now," I said convincingly. "But, Mr. Milbrath, there is need for absolute candor between us. Without your confidence I can work only in a half light, and

you know what that means. May I ask some questions?"

"Certainly."

"Have *you* any theory as to who murdered Mr. Somhers?"

Milbrath's eyes fell and he pulled out his watch and glanced at it nervously.

"No," he said, after a second.

I heard Kilbourne catch his breath sharply, but his face remained impassive.

"And there is no one whom you suspect of knowing who did it?"

Again Milbrath took out his watch and looked at it with unseeing eyes before he spoke.

"N-o," he said again.

CHAPTER III

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

THERE was a pause when the only sound was the voices of a trio of men across the room. Then Milbrath said slowly:

"You argued once, I remember, that the man who did that deed was older or less vigorous than I. Do you mind telling me how you reached that conclusion?"

"By deduction."

"Yes?"

"Did not the dust stains on the back of the trouser-legs and at the bottom and back of the coat mean something to you?"

"I confess that I had forgotten that point."

"It was not developed, but it was a fact testified to. What could it mean but that Mr. Somhers' body was dragged? And the curious tear on the back of the coat? And the piece of cloth that was found on the small nail on the side of the couch? Did they not show that the body had been lifted — by its armpits, presumably—from the floor to the couch?"

"By George!" cried Milbrath. "You mean that the assassin was not strong enough to *lift* the body and carry it?"

"Precisely. Would an able-bodied young man like you pull a body, when you could lift it easily and carry it noiselessly and quickly?"

A new thought seemed to come to Milbrath, and his face lost its sudden glow.

"If the crime were not premeditated, if ——" he began, and hesitated. "Is it not possible that the assassin was strong, but so startled by his deed as to become weak for the moment?"

"Possible, but improbable, for there is the abnormal strength which excitement or fear gives."

Mr. Milbrath rose. He seemed suddenly tired. He looked at his watch again, this time comprehendingly.

"I must leave you if I can be of no assistance just now, for I wish to get back to the Oriental tonight," he said. "You sound logical, Mr. Bliss, and, as you can believe, there is no one more anxious for your success than I. If you are successful you may count on me to do as well by you as that old gentleman. No; by George! I'll go him one better. I will give you *forty* thousand dollars. But be certain of your man before you hold him. I have found, you see, how hollow a thing is circumstantial evidence."

I accompanied Mr. Milbrath to the street door, but Kilbourne, after a listless handshake with the young man, returned to his chair. When I returned he appeared to be asleep.

"Will you have a game of billiards now?" I asked, rapping him on the shoulder, for I knew that he was awake.

"No; home and bed for me," with a yawn. "I'm insufferably weary with listening to all your twaddle."

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"Thank you. I hope you will feel more agreeable in the morning. Was it the oysters in August, or the watermelon?"

"Ah! Clevah lad!" and Kilbourne eyed me with a grin that asked pardon for his words. "So deuced clevah! No; it is this protégé of yours who has given me the colic."

"You don't like him?"

"Quite true, but not to like people is no uncommon feature in me, you'll admit."

"Be reasonable. In plain language, what do you think of Harrison Milbrath?"

"Oh, your estimate of him will pass."

"Just a big boy, saddened by a bitter experience for which he was blameless?"

"I guess you have it, though he knows more that you want to know than he is willing to tell."

"Do you think it is anything that implicates him?"

"N-o."

"Then give me your interest in this case. I'll get out of him what he withheld to-night and you will help me clear his name."

"Not I!"

"Because you have taken one of your absurd and unaccountable dislikes to the boy!"

"That may be the reason why his case does not interest me. I've found, however, that my 'absurd and unaccountable dislikes' are pretty well founded, usually."

"On intuition."

"That is sufficient."

"Not for a man of your intellect."

"As you like about that. It is better, nevertheless, for that young man and me to remain a good distance apart."

"Why?" I asked, knowing full well what the substance of the answer would be, for, before then, I had run up against a similar phase of Murray Kilbourne's contradictory nature.

"Well, Mr. Milbrath and I are natural antagonists. Conversationally we should get along amicably enough; but there is something in his life or in mine that will make me want to knife him before we are done with each other," answered Kilbourne.

"For heaven's sake, Kilbourne!" I cried. "The good Lord certainly made a mistake when he turned you out. You were designed for an old woman!"

Kilbourne grinned sympathetically.

"All right," he returned. "He gave me broad, strong, masculine shoulders, at all events. I can bear anything that you care to call me."

I was too annoyed by Kilbourne's attitude to discuss the matter further with him at that time, and as he persisted in his intention to return home, we parted for the night.

As I passed through the room on my way to the street my attention was attracted to the figure of a small man huddled in one of the great chairs, and I recognized the insignificant figure as Barney Raf-ferts, a two-penny detective whom I had bumped against at various times in my reportorial experience.

"Hello, Barney!" I said, approaching him.
"Hello, there! Don't pose sweet slumber. I can

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see you winking." Whereupon Barney unclosed two small and shifting eyes, and regarded me with a yawn.

"Ah there, Bliss. Say, if you are going out I think I'll join you. I'm done here."

We walked across the block to Broadway and parted at once, for I took the first car that came along and left Rafferts standing on the corner. He was a measly cur, a discredit to his profession, but he was too small to win more than a passing contempt, and I quickly dismissed him and the conjecture as to his probable mission to the Reform Club from my mind for the time.

The following noon, when Kilbourne and I lunched together at the Astor House, Kilbourne was in a more relenting mood.

"Oh, yes," he said, in answer to my invitation, "I'll run up to Winton for Sunday to see how many ghosts you've laid in the haunted castle, and maybe we can track down a working theory, if you've not caught one by that time."

After lunch I had just time to get to my lodgings for my suitcase and to the station before my train left.

As I let myself into the house, my attention was attracted to a large white envelope lying upon the shelf beneath the mirror that also served as a hall tree just inside the door. It was addressed to me, and, catching it up, I tore it open hastily and pulled out the sheet of white writing paper that it contained. In typewriting, without heading, salutation, or signature, was this message:

None but the unwary or the foolish would venture to Overlook. There is danger there for YOU. Beware of Horsford.

I turned again to the envelope, which was of ordinary make, such as can be purchased of any stationer. The typewritten address was correct, and my name was given in full. But it bore neither stamp nor postmark. It had come, then, by person. I called the maids, both of whom professed ignorance of the note's arrival. The landlady showed acute mystification. Her room was the first floor rear and she had seen every one, she said, who let himself in or out of the house, or had rung, since my own departure in the morning. In her opinion, the message had been left by some one living in the house, but that idea I rejected mentally, for I knew that no one (unless I talked in my sleep) could know of my proposed trip to Overlook. Moreover, I had communicated my intention of going there to but two persons, Kilbourne and Milbrath, and it was improbable that any one had overheard our conversation unless ——

My mind flew to Rafferts. Had that miserable cur anything to do with it? I rejected the possibility after a moment's reflection, for even had he overheard our conversation and wished to annoy me by means of an anonymous message it would be more like him to leave it at the club than to shadow me home, the only way, I knew, that he could have learned where I lived. My mail and directory address had for years been the club, and I had been in my present rooming place so short a time that I felt

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certain that even Kilbourne did not know my street. For the same reason Milbrath could not come under suspicion, even had our acquaintance permitted him to play such a prank.

But I had no time to consider the matter any further just then. I promised the maids a liberal reward if they could find who left the note, and then I made a dash for the train.

On the way to Winton, the undercurrent of my thoughts was busy with that mysterious letter. Who was Horsford? Where had I heard the name? But I was to know about Horsford — and very soon.

CHAPTER IV

WHO HORSFORD WAS

THE village of Winton lies on a neck of land that curves around like a bent forefinger pointing oceanward. On one side the surf pounds upon a stony beach at the foot of a stretch of marsh; on the other side, across the tiny bay, lies the county seat of Beverly. The main street follows the curve of the land from the lighthouse on the point well back on the neck; and there, in neighborly proximity, one finds church and post office, shops and homes.

Where the buildings begin to straggle away from one another at the north end of the street, the road makes a sudden turn to the left to within a hundred yards of the bay, then northward again for half a mile, until it appears to be stopped by the grilled iron gates at the main entrance to Overlook. As a matter of fact, the last two hundred feet of this road is simply an approach to the main drive to the villa, which stands upon a bluff looking toward Beverly, while the highroad continues with a flourish to the right, on the other side of a small triangle of woods.

The sun, red and uncompromisingly hot, was sinking into a line of sullen gray clouds at the horizon, when I stepped from the train that August evening and looked about me.

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An uncommonly attractive girl, who had attracted and held my covert interest during the trip and who left the car while I was struggling with a strap on my suitcase, had vanished, and she and I appeared to have been the only passengers deposited at the little station.

On the farther side of the tracks the marsh stretched in uninterrupted desolation to the very sun itself, it seemed. The rails glistened in a long, curving line to the left, and the train that had brought me became a diminishing object soon lost to sight. From the marsh came the monotonous croak of frogs and the cry of a wild bird.

A chill of loneliness swept over me, and I turned with an involuntary shudder to find myself face to face with an odd-looking old man who stood in the doorway of the one-room station. His face was as innocent of hair as a new born babe's, but brown and seamed with countless lines. He wore a wig of pale brown hair a score of years too young for him, and his eyes, small and shrewd and blue, met mine with an amused twinkle.

"Purty scen'ry," he volunteered cheerfully, with a wave of his hand toward the desolate marshland.

"To be sure. Can you tell me how far Overlook is from here?"

The old man looked me over curiously.

"Overlook?" he repeated. "W-all, I guess I can, but p'raps you don' know there ain't nobody livin' at Overlook now but the farmer."

"Yes; I do know. It is the farmer I want to see."

"Ho! W-all, it's a consid'able ways out there."

"Is there any one about here who will drive me out?"

"W-all, my boy Hank 'll have to take ye if I say so, an' if ye don' mind waitin' 'round till we can hitch up."

"Thank you. I will wait. I dare say it will not take long?"

"'Bout fifteen min'ets. Say, I'm station agent here, an' I'm going to shet up fer the night. That was the last train till six to-morrow mornin'. Don' mind comin' 'cross the road to my house, d' ye, while we fix ye out with a rig?"

"No; I will go."

We took a few steps in silence. Then the old man looked up at me, curiosity overrunning every feature.

"My name's John Hutton," he said.

"Mine is Bliss," I responded.

"Good! Ye're from N' Yo'k, I s'ppose?"

"Yes."

"Hum! W-all, there's my house." He spoke with pride as he pointed to a cottage opposite the rear of the station. "An' that's my wife on the p'azzie. Here, Eliza Ann, this stranger is a-goin' to wait while Hank hitches up to take him to Overlook."

I declined the proffered chair and seated myself on a step. Hutton disappeared immediately, and Mrs. Hutton continued to sway placidly to and fro in her big chair, her plump hands crossed upon her ample stomach. Presently she spoke.

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"Overlook ain't so much of a place now the old man's gone," she said.

"I dare say it has run down."

"An' they do say over village way it's for rent, after all that happened there, too. Who'd want to live there, *I'd* like to know?"

I laughed.

"I think I shall not mind. I've taken it for a time," I answered.

The old lady looked interested.

"For the land's sake!" she exclaimed. "You don' say!" and she continued to regard me in amused meditation. "You've got good nerves, I s'ppose?" she volunteered presently.

"I have always believed so."

"W-all, that's a good thing, I sh'd say. I don' wan' to scare you since you've got the place on your han's, but over village way they do say that Mr. Somhers comes back to Overlook sometimes. You'd better not tell your wife that when she comes. I'm just a-tellin' you so you can be lookin' out. Any children, have you?"

"I'm a bachelor."

"You don' say!" A long pause. "An' you takin' the Place of Silence? That's most as bad as Mr. Somhers himself. I never could see what a man wants to live alone for."

At that moment Mr. Hutton appeared to announce that the "hoss an' buggy" were ready, and I paid my adieux to Mrs. Hutton, who suddenly wondered whether I would like "a bite o' somethin' to eat."

I assured her, with thanks, that doubtless I should be able to get supper at the farm, and left her smiling placidly.

It was quite apparent that the raw-boned lad of fifteen or thereabouts, whom the station master informally introduced as "my gran'boy, Hank," was not over-delighted with the idea of conveying me to Overlook.

"I ain't got no use fer that place," he declared unexpectedly when we were well on the way. "This 's the third time gran'dad 's sent me out here at dark with some city feller like you. Wish that seven o'clock train got in at noon, I do," and Hank kicked the dashboard vindictively."

"Say," he continued presently, looking at me with new interest, "air you a detective?"

"What gave you an idea that I might be a detective?"

"Over village way here they say Harry Milbrath, who killed his uncle, is trying to make folks think he did n't do it by sendin' detective men up from N' Yo'k to look 's as if they was tryin' to fin' out somebody else that did it. The other two fellers was detectives, I guess."

I had a fancy that the boy was right on that point.

"Pretty nice place, Overlook, is n't it?" I asked after a minute.

The boy hunched his shoulders but did not answer; nor could I induce him to further conversation.

We were passing through the village by this time, and I observed, first with amusement, then with

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something akin to discomfort, that we were the centre of attraction. There appeared to be something unusual about us, for though it was dusk, men paused and looked back at us. At first I supposed my companion to be the source of this attention, but I overheard a word spoken by one of a group of men standing upon the steps of the post office that enlightened me.

"Is it because we are going to Overlook that people stare at us?" I asked Henry.

"Yep."

"Good heavens! Does no one in town ever go up to the place?"

"Nope."

"Why?"

No answer.

"Do you think me a detective?"

"Yep."

By this time we had turned off the main street, and it was a country road over which we jogged. The soft summer dusk had settled all around us, and the only sounds that broke upon the air besides the pounding of the horse's feet upon the earth and the rattle of the "buggy" were the croak of frogs and the gentle "swish" of water lapping the beach below. It was a silence which, in my present state of mind, seemed uncanny. I sighed with relief when Henry drove into a private roadway and almost immediately pulled up before a small red-roofed house. We had taken the highroad to the left of the wooded triangle and reached the cottage of the farmer of Overlook.

"There," said Henry, in a tone of relief, "here you be, an' I hope you don' wan' me to stay?"

"No; here's your money. I'm much obliged to you." And I could not resist adding: "Now go *quick* before the ghost of the Place of Silence catches you." And then I stepped back and laughed heartily at the rapidity with which the lad whirled around and was off.

I turned to the door of the cottage to find it open and myself face to face with a youngish man, broad and athletic in appearance, beardless and sunburned — scarcely the man I expected to see there, for my conception of Mr. Arms was of a lean man and elderly.

"I wish to see Mr. Arms," I said.

"'E is yonder," answered the man, pointing northeastward. "There is a white 'ouse with green blinds ten minutes beyond. 'E lives there."

"Is this not Overlook?"

"Aye, sir."

"And is not Mr. Arms the farmer here?"

"'E was, sir," corrected the man laconically, "but I ham the farmer now."

"Indeed!" It seemed curious that Mr. Milbrath should have given me an introduction to a man no longer on the place. It looked as if he did not know of the change. I could not see, however, that it made much difference to me.

"Well, then," I answered, "you, not Mr. Arms, are the man I want. I am the new tenant for Overlook. My man will be on to-morrow. In the meantime can you give me shelter and food? This note

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from Mr. Milbrath will explain the situation," and I handed him the introduction.

Instantly the same expression of curiosity that I had observed on the face of nearly every one who had looked at me since I arrived in Winton came into this man's face.

"Aye, sir," he responded courteously, "but," he hesitated, "if you will excuse me, sir, I think you will be more comfortable with my cousin, who is Mr. Arms. I can drive you hover. The rooms 'ere are small and ——"

"That will not bother me in the least," I interrupted, "and I do not wish to put you or your wife to any trouble. A bed or a cot anywhere will do for the night. I dare say I shall be able to get into the villa to-morrow."

The man's heavy brows lowered a trifle, but his voice remained even and courteous.

"I should be glad to accommodate you, sir, but my wife is — far from well."

A young woman whom I had observed through the open door of an adjoining room now came slowly forward, a toddling child clutching at her skirts.

"Harsk the gentleman in, Joe," she interrupted sharply, "and I will lay out a bite for 'im before I 'ush the babe to sleep."

The man, whose large form had blocked the doorway, made room for me to pass within, and as I did so I heard the woman mutter beneath her breath to him: "'Ave you no sense, you?"

Both man and woman spoke with a distinct Cockney accent, and I was not long in learning from the

woman as she moved about getting ready some food that they had come from England a short time before Mr. Somhers' tragic end; that Mr. Arms, who had been beneficiary to five thousand dollars by the will of Mr. Somhers, had shortly thereafter bought the little place on which he was now living and had recommended that his cousin Joe be placed in charge of Overlook farm and grounds until, at least, affairs connected with the estate should be settled.

When I had finished the meal, the woman had disappeared with the child, and I walked out to the tiny portico where Joe sat, pipe in mouth, with his feet against the rail and his chair tilted back against the house. He rose at once and offered me his chair, but I took the steps, saying that I would like to sit there a while and smoke a cigar.

To my disappointment I found that Joe could not be induced to talk, and we sat in a silence that seemed to grow deeper and more depressing as the twilight faded into night. I hailed with relief, therefore, the reappearance of the wife, whom I had found to be possessed of a loquacious tongue. I encouraged her to join us, though I clearly saw that her husband opposed her coming. She needed little encouragement to talk, and once started she chatted unceasingly like a child — mostly about her former connection with Lord Lindley's family, of which she appeared proud; and she laughed a good deal, and rather noisily.

After a little she grew suddenly quiet, and I saw in the dim light that her head had sunk to her husband's arm and that she slept.

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Joe looked down upon the quiet face and heaved a sigh. Was it of relief? It occurred to me what he had said of his wife's health. She looked well — as robust and buxom as a dairy maid, and of much that type. "But," I meditated prosaically, "appearances are not to be relied upon." The thought suggested the time. Doubtless it was past the hour these simple-living, early risers were in the habit of retiring.

"If you will show me where I am to sleep, I will leave you for the night," I said.

The man rose and transferred the woman's head to the chair seat — for she was sitting on a low stool. She did not rouse, and I marveled that in so short a time she should sleep so soundly.

We crossed the living room, and the man threw open a door at the farther end where a lamp burned.

"It is not much, sir," he said, "but the woman 'as made it ready."

"It will do very well," I responded. "By the way, is your name Arms?"

"It is not, sir."

"Then what is it?"

The man turned from me with a start, for there was a low moan from the portico.

"My name, sir," he said, "is Joseph 'Orsford. Good night, sir. I would harsk that you bolt ye're door." And he was halfway back to the portico before I had recovered sufficiently from the start his words gave me to close myself within the room that had been prepared for me.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT IN THE COTTAGE

“JOSEPH 'ORSFORD, sir.”

The answer had come quietly enough, yet it had fallen on my ears like the explosion of a bomb. So this was the man against whom my anonymous correspondent warned me! He was a harmless appearing man, stolid and not clever, but not bad, surely; a type of Briton very common in and near London, not always a farmer — a 'bus or cab driver, more likely, or, perhaps, a mechanic.

I had ceased to regard the warning as a practical joke, but as I was still in the dark concerning its purpose or its author — for I had abandoned the idea that Barney Rafferts had anything to do with it — I had resolved to act without reference to it, except as to keeping myself alert to discover whence it came.

After the first shock of surprise, therefore, I threw off all thought connected with my new duties and, peacefully puffing my pipe, I indulged in a short series of dreams and speculations concerning the girl who also had arrived in Winton that evening.

Rousing from that pleasant pastime, I turned into bed for a night of sound sleep — as I fancied at the time.

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I was bordering on slumber, I think, when I became conscious of a sound which brought me suddenly into a sitting posture in the bed and put all my faculties at once upon the alert. There was a moment's silence, and then it came again — a long, low wail, followed presently by a sharp snarl, as of rage. Then came a sibilation of quick whispers, and, after a little, a sob, a woman's piteous sob.

Noiselessly I left my bed and crept to the window. A young moon lay low on the horizon, and in the light which it shed upon the earth I could distinguish dimly in the distance the shining roofs of a building hidden behind the trees — the villa of Overlook, no doubt, where Mr. Somhers had come to his untimely end.

Slowly, and careful to make no noise, I opened the shutters of the window. But there was nothing either human or animal in sight; the noise had been within the house. Hastily I slipped on some clothing and stepped to the door leading into the front room, prepared to go out and learn more if the sound came again. But it was not repeated, and, after a time, I tiptoed back to the bed and threw myself upon it dressed, prepared, however, to court sleep. But none came. My mind was still alert and insistent upon taking up the threads of the Somhers tragedy, which I had resolutely kept from dwelling upon since my arrival upon the scene of its enactment.

I recalled my first acquaintance with the old gentleman — not old then, but in active middle life. He had recently lost his wife, and his mind was so

full of his grief that a change of scene had become imperative. I was a lad at the time, taking with my parents my first trip across the ocean. Mr. Somhers and my father became interested in each other as soon as they found themselves side by side upon the steamer's deck. During the winter that followed our return home, Mr. Somhers visited us, and for many years thereafter — so long as my father lived, indeed, Mr. Somhers and he kept friendly tabs on each other. It had been Mr. Somhers' custom to spend a portion of each winter in New York, so it was possible for my father and him to continue their pleasant relations.

I had not seen Mr. Somhers for perhaps twelve years previous to his death. My recollection of him was of an alert-looking man of middle height, with hair whitening about the temples, who had once taken me upon his knees on the deck of an ocean liner and had entertained me with tales of another little boy, whose name, Mr. Somhers said, was Roland; but Mr. Somhers told me that he had gone far, far away — too far for me to see him for a long time.

Some years before my father's death Mr. Somhers bought Overlook, and my father visited him. I remember that father spoke on his return home of the orphaned nephew, younger than I, whom Mr. Somhers had taken to live with him, and I recollect that he predicted that the lad, who was active and restless and for whom Mr. Somhers had no affection, would not have an easy boyhood. The next that I recall hearing of Mr. Somhers was of his tragic end.

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The case was a particularly mysterious and complex one, it seemed to me, but the men who were assigned to investigate it reached quick conclusions, and they were prepared by the end of the first week to lay the responsibility for the deed, with an outwardly convincing chain of proof, at the door of the nephew, Harrison Milbrath.

Detail upon detail that had not occurred to me when I outlined the case to Kilbourne flashed through my mind. Evidence had developed the fact that Mr. Somhers and his nephew had lived together under stirring conditions. With servants and acquaintances in general Mr. Somhers had a reputation of being amicable and benevolent, a student who preferred his books to animate companionship, but who greeted the occasional visitor to Overlook with an old-world courtesy.

With Harrison Milbrath he was the reverse. He made no secret of his aversion to the lad, whom most people were disposed to like, and before Harry's departure for college the violent quarrels in which uncle and nephew engaged were town talk.

On the 12th of October following Harry's graduation from college, the servants in the house heard unusually loud voices in Mr. Somhers' library. Shortly thereafter Harrison Milbrath left the house. At the luncheon hour the housemaid tapped upon Mr. Somhers' door, as usual, announcing lunch. Sometimes Mr. Somhers answered the summons, as often he did not; and it was an understood condition in the household that the meal was not to be kept for him after a given time. On this

day he did not lunch; neither did Milbrath appear. At six o'clock the dinner gong was sounded and when the half hour had passed without the appearance in the dining room of either Mr. Somhers or the younger man the housemaid again tapped at the library door. There was no answer.

She tapped again and again, and then, with a curiosity that she could not resist, she cautiously turned the doorknob. The door yielded to her touch, and she peeped inside. The room was in darkness, but the light from the entry streamed in through the open door and fell directly upon the figure of Mr. Somhers recumbent upon the couch. There was nothing unusual in his attitude, so far as the girl could describe, but with a prescience of calamity she fled screaming to the kitchen. She declared that Mr. Somhers was dead, and continued to scream until she fainted.

The stableman, who was eating his evening meal in the kitchen at the moment, acceding to the clamor of the cook, went reluctantly to the library, declaring that Mr. Somhers was probably only asleep and that he would lose his job for his interference. What he saw turned him cold with horror and — well, half an hour later all Winton knew that the estimable Peter Somhers had met a tragic end.

He lay upon his back on the couch, his hands and feet hanging over it, a gash upon his left temple and eye. Life had been extinct, physicians said, fully two hours. The curious fact that I had mentioned to Kilbourne of the absence of blood stains, except on the body and clothes of the victim, had not been

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dwelt upon sufficiently, it seemed to me. From the nature of the wound it must have bled freely. Had the assassin stopped, then, after his terrible deed, to staunch the flow of life-blood? It seemed so, and he must have taken away with him the cloth or sponge used for that purpose. And the oilcloth! From where had that come, that no one recognized it?

On the morning following, Harrison Milbrath, white and hollow-eyed, returned to Winton on the southbound train. He had been in Boston he said, from four o'clock on the previous afternoon, until that morning when, on reading the shocking news of his uncle's death, he had hurried back.

When he came to trial, the prosecution made out a different situation. He had quarreled with his uncle in the morning, it asserted, and had left the house a little later, looking pale and fierce. He had eaten dinner at noon at the village hotel, after which he walked back to Overlook, entered the house quietly by means of his latchkey and attacked his uncle with murderous intent. He had paused to staunch the flow of blood and to move his victim to the couch, or, possibly, he had killed him as he slept. Then he slipped through the library window found unlocked, or boldly left by the front door which locked behind him. Then the prosecution produced the conductor of the five o'clock train from Beverly to Boston, who swore that Milbrath had been a passenger on his train on October 12th.

Milbrath's defense denied this. He had started

for Boston at one-thirty. Unfortunately, however, the conductor of the one-thirty train could not recall his passengers of that day sufficiently well to verify this assertion. Milbrath was fairly well known among the trainmen on the Boston trains, for, being a Harvard man, he had been a frequent patron of the road that passed through Beverly. But as misfortune would have it, the men in charge of both afternoon trains on October 12th were comparative strangers to that section.

The defense did not, however, deny that there had been an unusually stormy scene between uncle and nephew on the morning preceding the tragedy, nor did it challenge the state's evidence that Milbrath dined at the village hostelry and later returned to Overlook. But it averred that the defendant had not seen his uncle after the morning's disagreement. He returned for his suitcase, which was packed to be taken away, for he had previously planned a trip to Boston that day. He entered the house, not by means of his latchkey, but through a side door which he tried and found unlocked — notwithstanding the testimony of the maids that this door and all other outside doors were locked that day. He went directly to his room on the second floor where he remained for ten minutes, and then went out of the house and walked through the woods to the Beverly station.

At the second trial, six months later, the state and the defense offered practically the same evidence, but this time Harrison Milbrath proved an alibi on the day of the murder.

To the astonishment of every one, it seemed, an elderly gentleman of unquestionable reliability (I recalled definitely at that moment that it was a clergyman) testified that he met Harrison Milbrath at the Park Square station in Boston at four o'clock on the afternoon of October 12th, and that Milbrath and he were together until late in the evening. He maintained this assertion through a rapid fire of cross-examination, but with good-humored wit parried every question that would lead him into a quagmire of explanation. It was no one's affair, he informed the state, why Mr. Milbrath and he were together that day. It should be sufficient that the three witnesses who corroborated his testimony were reliable persons.

Step by step my memory carried me back over the details of the case; even the names of many of the witnesses, with the mental pictures that I had formed of their appearance, came back to me vividly. Suddenly out from all the others stood one name, that of the housemaid who found Mr. Somers' body on the couch, who had been so badly overcome, who, also, had been the state's chief witness in the matter of the family jars, and who had sworn that all outside doors were locked at Overlook on that eventful afternoon of October 12th — Maggie Arms!

CHAPTER VI

THE PLACE OF SILENCE

NOTWITHSTANDING my involved introspection, I must have fallen asleep quickly and rested well, for the next sound of which I was conscious was a baby's voice cooing happily, and a man's full bass essaying to still it with a frequent low "tut! tut!"

I looked at my watch. It was half past six, and the sunlight lay in yellow shafts on the grass between the trees outside my window.

I dressed hastily and went into the living room. As I did so, Mr. Horsford came from the kitchen with the child, still cooing and sputtering, in his arms.

"A bright bit o' day we are 'avin', sir," he said, after the usual exchange of greetings. "I 'ope you rested well, sir?" He looked at me steadily, his eyes narrowing as he uttered the last words. He appeared relieved when I assured him that I remembered nothing from the moment I fell asleep until six-thirty.

That ended our conversation for the time, for Horsford seemed as uncommunicative as on the previous evening. His wife, too, appeared to have sobered down considerably and was almost as taciturn as her husband.

She served my breakfast on the round table in the front room, where she had given me supper, and I observed that the high color I had noted in the evening was somewhat dimmed, and that shadows of purple lay beneath her eyes, the lids of which she persistently kept lowered. Horsford kept the child by him, and when I had done with the meal he put the boy in a tiny playground fenced in with tennis wire which he had constructed within view of the kitchen windows, and came to the portico, a string of keys dangling in his hand.

"'Appen you will want to 'ave a look at Hoverlook, sir," he said. "If you would wish, sir, I can go yonder wi' you before I go again t' the field."

I should have preferred to sit on the portico while I smoked a cigar and, perchance, get a few words with Mrs. Horsford. I was keenly curious to know the meaning of those sounds of the night before, and if any one in that household were likely to help me to the facts it was that good housewife herself with her loquacious tongue. I did not like the atmosphere of mystery at the cottage, and, taken in connection with the revelation which the name of the housemaid had brought me, I could but conjecture that the Arms family knew more about Mr. Somhers' death than had been developed at the time of Mr. Milbrath's trials, that the Horsfords were in possession of the facts, and that Horsford intimidated his wife lest her voluble speech get them into trouble. These, however, were but conjectures, and as I had no plausible excuse to decline Horsford's

offer I proceeded at once with him up the gravel road.

This road was, in fact, a beautiful drive lined with elm trees, and it led directly to the rear of the villa, a quarter of a mile distant.

On the right of the drive lay a hollow of green pasture lands, with grain fields and garden rising beyond. On the left, a miniature forest ran into the triangle of woods of which I have already spoken.

Near the cottage we passed a grain house and a barn for farming implements; beyond were the stables and ice house, and back of the villa I caught a glimpse of a long, low hothouse, then in disuse, and a stretch of sunken gardens, which in Mr. Somers' time had been gay with flowers, but which then were plantless and grass-grown. The fountain, too, with its gilded Mercury, was silent and dry. I was surprised that the grounds were so green and well kept, but Horsford explained that it was Mr. Milbrath's order that the place, which had been his uncle's pride, should not become weed-clogged. Here and there among the trees a bit of statuary gleamed, and ahead the waters of the bay shimmered and danced in the morning sunshine.

The villa stood upon a bluff, and from its front door a serpentine driveway wound and twisted among grassed terraces to the iron entrance gates, thirty feet or more below. The building itself was of gray stone, blackened with age, on which woodbine everywhere crawled and twined. The main structure was square with two wide porticos, one

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above the other, on the front. From either side a one-story addition stretched out like wings.

Horsford maintained a stolid silence, broken only by laconic answers to my occasional queries, as we traversed the distance between the cottage and the house. If he was curious as to how I purposed to live with the help of only one man in this big, lonely old house, he did not betray it.

At the portico he paused.

"If you are wantin' 'elp to straighten things hout a bit," he said, "my wife could get you someun to do it. It may seem 'er place, sir, to hoffer to 'elp, but she 'as such an 'orror of the 'ouse I'm afraid I should 'ave 'ard work to make 'er come up, sir."

To have Mrs. Horsford, or any one, clean Overlook before I had an opportunity to go over it carefully was the last thing for which I wished.

"Do not try," I answered. "My man, Gaspard, will be here on the evening train, and he will do all that needs to be done. I intend to live simply, and shall try to make the most of the good fishing I am told is a feature here."

Horsford looked at me steadily, the same suspicious expression I had noted the evening before coming into his eyes.

"Ho!" he said, quite involuntarily it seemed. "I s'pposed, sir, you were another of the men Mr. Milbrath seems to 'ave workin' on the mystery."

"Are there men still at work on the mystery?" I asked, with an appearance of interest.

"'Appen there are, sir," hesitatingly.

"Indeed! I certainly hope that Mr. Milbrath

will not send any more — at least while I am here. I hardly think I should enjoy being spied upon. Did you ? ”

Horsford's burned skin assumed a redder hue.

“ I canno' say I did, sir.” And he added hastily: “ But of course it were not me they cared about, sir.”

“ Of course not. On the contrary, I should suppose that you might be of considerable assistance to them. You were in Winton at the time of the tragedy, were you not ? ”

“ Not 'ere, sir. Beverly.”

“ Ah! Not so far away but that you heard what the townspeople had to say of the case. Perhaps you will not mind telling me something about it. Once I was a newspaper man, and I still like a good story. Besides, I think I should like to know how things are supposed to have happened in this house in which I am to spend the remainder of the summer.”

Horsford's expression implied that he believed only half of what I was saying.

“ I do no' know much abou' hit, sir, save that the old gentleman were knocked down or 'it on the 'ead an' were dead when 'e were found, an' that young Mr. Milbrath, who was 'is nevvvy, as 'appen you know, sir, was said to 'ave done it.”

“ Do *you* believe that he did it ? ” I asked quickly.

Horsford hesitated.

“ I do no', sir, but 'e seemed to be the only one they could find. Aye, sir, this is a 'aunted place

now an' I would no' like to 'ave anyun stay 'ere long."

"It begins to look as if I should have something besides the fish and the boating to interest me! The place is haunted, you say? By a real ghost?"

Horsford did not appear to appreciate my levity.

"It it not the ghost only, sir," he said soberly. "It is the *feelin'* wot 'angs o'er everything up 'ere. 'Appen it came to you after you passed the stable, sir?"

"I cannot truthfully say that it did; but then, I'm not given to nerves. Did not the detectives you spoke of stop here?"

"Not over night, sir. Never! They put up at the Winton 'Ouse."

I took the keys from Horsford's hand, and opened the door with the one he indicated.

"Welcome to Overlook, Elmer Bliss," I said cheerfully to myself, as I stepped inside. "And may good luck attend your efforts!" I added mentally.

Horsford, none too willingly, followed me and helped me throw up the shades and the windows and open the blinds. The rooms were cheerfully and handsomely furnished, and with the sunlight flooding them, they did not look as if they had been closed for nearly two years upon an unexplained tragedy.

Everything was covered with dust, of course, but Horsford told me he believed everything to have been left as it stood upon the day of the murder. The two women servants had abandoned the house

upon the day of Mr. Milbrath's arrest, and the stablemen and gardeners, who had their own quarters, had taken their meals at the cottage until their dismissal by the executors of the estate some time later. Therefore, from the week following Mr. Somhers' death until this morning, Overlook had been a deserted house, a "place of silence" indeed, except for the occasional visit of an investigator of crime.

A wide hall with a staircase at the rear ran through the house. At the foot of the stairs was a door leading into a small entry and thence to the side porch, and was the door by which Mr. Milbrath affirmed that he entered and left the house when he returned for his suitcase on the day of the tragedy. On the right of the hall were a dining room and kitchen, with a billiard room leading from the dining room into the north extension. On the left were two parlors; the extension room, separated from the parlors by a narrow entry which likewise opened onto a small portico, had been Mr. Somhers' library, and was the room where the housemaid, Maggie Arms, was the first to see the master of Overlook lying dead.

The second floor contained sleeping rooms; the third floor a large storeroom in which were ranged boxes and trunks and discarded pieces of furniture, and a sleeping room which had been occupied by the two women servants.

Upon the threshold of the library Horsford hesitated.

"I do no' like this place, sir," he said, with a

visible shudder. "I would to God you would no' think of remainin' in it. It is a place of mysteries, an' you would be far more comfortable in the village."

I laughed.

"Tut, Horsford! Such nonsense from an able-bodied man like you! A beautiful place like this should not be permitted to go to ruin in disuse, and I mean to enjoy myself here free from old-womanish fancies. Come, give me a hand with this window, will you?"

The deep red appeared again beneath the burn in Horsford's face, but he said no more and did as I asked.

When we had gone through the house, looking into each room and closet, I dismissed Horsford.

"I shall be obliged if Mrs. Horsford can let me have dinner with you," I said. "After that I hope to have Gaspard with me and shall trouble you only for cream and eggs and the fresh things from the garden, which, doubtless, you can supply."

Horsford nodded.

"Aye, sir. Good day, sir," he said, and was off, heartily glad, apparently, to get away.

I watched him for a moment going at a quick pace across the lawn, and then I looked off upon the panorama that stretched before my eyes as I stood upon the portico.

Ahead lay the village of Winton, a row of straight, strong trees marking the line of the main street as it wandered out to the lighthouse that stood white and solitary on the point. To one side lay

the bay and the spires and glistening roofs of Beverly. Beyond the lighthouse the bay widened into the ocean, and I could see the surf pounding unceasingly upon the stony shore at the foot of the marshlands beyond the Winton station.

Such a bit of scenery, bright with the sun of a glorious day, should have acted like champagne upon my spirits. Instead, a sense of hopelessness swept over me as I turned back to the house. It was the first feeling of discouragement to which I had yielded, and so strong was the remnant of superstition in me that for the moment I could but believe that it was a forerunner of impending disappointment. The next instant I shook myself, and resolutely turned to the library, determined to begin my work with a cheerful mind.

I paused at the entrance to the room and made a careful survey of it. It was an unusually large apartment, being fully twenty-five feet wide by thirty feet long. The two windows, which faced the west, were about eight feet apart, and between them was placed a roll-top desk in oak. A swivel chair with arms stood before it.

On the south wall was an open fireplace with a black marble mantel above it; and near by stood a leather reading-chair with a padded head-roll. There was but one other chair in the room, straight-backed, rush-bottomed and of Colonial appearance — an heirloom, probably.

Everywhere were books in cases built into the wall. Every inch of available wall space was taken, from an inch above the floor to the height of five

feet. On the walls above hung a few good pictures, but all of subjects that testified to Mr. Somhers' erratic taste. Dante's "Inferno" was one of them; two others were reproductions of Sir Noel Paton's "Quarrel of Oberon and Titania" and "Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania." At a later period, Milbrath told me that for many years a picture of Mr. Somhers' only child, Roland, who had died at the age of seven, had hung between the windows above the desk, but long ago that had given place to the picture of Nero standing upon an eminence and watching with a triumphant and demoniacal smile the burning of distant Rome.

The couch upon which Mr. Somhers' body was found stretched across the southwest corner of the room before bookcases. Like the reading-chair it was upholstered in black leather. A valuable tiger-skin rug lay before the fireplace, and in the centre of the room under the chandelier was an oblong table with piles of papers and magazines.

This table was the first object upon which my gaze rested after opening up the room, but now as I glanced at it I perceived something which surely had not been there at that time. It was a sheet of foolscap paper, and as I approached it, I read easily the bold, upright, printed letters:

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,
He who ventures here were better dead.
Have a care!"

CHAPTER VII

THE UNSOCIABLE MR. ARMS

I TOOK the paper in my hands and examined it closely. The printing had been done with a writing fluid and very recently, for the ink, which in time would be black, was still blue. It had been done hastily, too, or by a person laboring under intense excitement, for the lettering was irregular. The paper was a half sheet of ordinary lined foolscap, a trifle ragged on the edge which had been cut.

My first act was to drop to the floor, careful not to obliterate any possible footprints.

The rug which covered the greater portion of the room had a background of straw color, and while dusty, showed little tracking. On the south side of the room it reached to the tiling before the fireplace; on the other three sides there was a border three feet wide, perhaps, between it and the bookcases or the door and windows, of a light-colored hardwood. From the door to the nearer window the prints of two pairs of shoes crossing and recrossing were unmistakably mine and Horsford's. My prints, that tracked towards the farther window, crossed the room diagonally and ran directly from the doorway to the table, I also found. But before the farther window, on the corresponding side of the table, and, indeed, at intervals throughout the southern end of the room from east to west *the dust was swept aside*

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in wide swaths. Obviously this had been done to cover the tracks of the intruder, and it showed me that I had a farseeing rascal with whom to deal.

I could not doubt that he had entered by the farther window — which, by the way, was the very one by which the assassin of Mr. Somhers was believed to have left — had put the warning upon the table, and had retreated by the same route, brushing vigorously the spots where he had trod. From the width of the marks it was evident that they had been made with a small brush like a whisk-broom. But why did my mysterious stranger use his brush beyond the line of the table and the fireplace, even to the southeast corner? Ah! A book was missing from the second shelf in the southeast corner!

In vain I searched for a footprint that the brush had overlooked. Not one remained. The bookshelf, even, gave me no assistance, except to show that the missing volume was one of a set of Byron's poems. Now, would Horsford take away a volume of Byron? Improbable, unless he were a cleverer man than I gave him credit for being, or unless he were acting under the instruction of a deep brain. Indeed, before I had fully analyzed the situation I had reached the conclusion that if Horsford had entered the room while I was standing upon the portico fancying him still hurrying fieldward, he was but the instrument of a cleverer man than himself.

The door leading from the entry to the tiny portico held back reluctantly when I tried to open it, and creaked with the stiffness of unused hinges

when at last I succeeded. The window through which my warner must have entered was but a step from this portico, and though I examined the ground and grass about it I could find no indication that they had been recently trodden upon, a curious condition, as the window sill stood a full four feet above the ground, and the intruder must have come down with some emphasis.

With an uncomfortable sense of being worsted, I returned to the library and closed and locked the windows and drew the shades. Then I closed and fastened the other windows which I had so recently opened throughout the first floor, and I saw that all doors were locked behind me as I left the house. I would see that screens were put in place before I left the windows open again. A locked screen does not prevent admission, but it is likely to bear some trace if tampered with.

I looked at my watch and found that it was only nine o'clock and there was yet time to call upon Mr. Arms before the noon hour. From the portico of the villa I could see the white house with its green shutters, which Horsford had said was Mr. Arms'. Near the house, I soon found, the road took a turn to the right and ran on and into the main street of Beverly.

The house looked asleep as I approached it half an hour later. The shutters were drawn and the front and side doors were closed. No sound, save the clucking of hens, disturbed the silence. Then there floated out upon the air a woman's fresh young voice: "Bonnie sweet Bessie, the maid of

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Dundee," she sang and stopped, for my knock upon the old-fashioned brass knocker resounded through the house.

Silence prevailed again, and again I applied the knocker. This time I caught a glimpse of a pink and white face through a shutter cautiously turned in a window close by, and directly the door was opened slowly. A young woman stood before me — the one whose song I had heard and whose cheek I had seen I did not doubt; but there was a curious, startled expression in her eyes that I could not understand.

"I should like to speak with Mr. Arms," I said.

"He has gone into town, sir," the startled expression deepening in her eyes.

"Will he return soon?"

"That, sir, I cannot say. Sometimes it is noon before — before the truck is sold."

"Then I will sit here on the steps for a while. He may come while I wait. I have walked from Overlook and this shade is pleasant."

"As you like, sir. If you would prefer to come inside, I will call mother."

I stepped in through a narrow hall, from which a pair of steep stairs climbed directly to the second floor, and into a darkened room, the door of which the girl threw open for me, and which proved to be a typical New England country parlor. Almost before my eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light the girl was back, and with her a stout and spirited looking elderly woman whom she said was "Ma."

"It is my son you would wish to see, sir?" asked Mrs. Arms.

"Your husband, is he not?" I responded. "Until recently the farmer at Overlook?"

Mrs. Arms laughed heartily, in a comfortable way that set her cap bows nodding.

"My 'usband? Ho, no, sir. My 'usband 'as been dead these five and twenty year. 'T is my son Jim who 'ad the farm at Hoverlook."

Here was another surprise for me, for I had pictured Mr. Arms as elderly as the woman before me appeared to be.

"You come from Hoverlook, did you tell Maggie?" asked Mrs. Arms.

"Yes, I am the new tenant."

"Well," she observed, "there be all sorts of folk in the wu-rrld, nor it would no' be the wu-rrld, I 'm thinkin', but why *anyun* should fancy Hoverlook now is beyondt me. When I were in the Duke o' Castlecourt's dairy afore I were married I 'eard enough about ghosts, I did indeed, sir—for the place were 'aunted—to last me all my life, an' I 've been glad to keep away from places wi' bad names since then. I were glad, indeed, when Jim got away from Hoverlook. An' I 'm thinkin' ye 'll be glad to go afore a great time, sir. 'Ave ye ne'er 'eard tha' the restless speerets o' the dead return t' 'aunt the places where they died?"

"Not that, but I have heard it said that the man who murders cannot resist the temptation to return to the scene of his crime."

A short gasp startled my half-facetious answer,

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and I turned quickly in the direction of the girl. She sat with her large black eyes wide upon me and the color coming and going in her face in waves.

"Maggie, go hout of the room," commanded Mrs. Arms, as though the girl were a child. "She's that narvous since the ol' man was killed that she hacts 's if she did it 'erself, she does, indeed, sir," Mrs. Arms explained, turning to me with a trace of impatience in her voice.

Maggie left the room without a word, but her face was no longer pale, and I felt constrained to remark:

"I fear I am to blame for having lingered over so gruesome a subject as Mr. Somhers' death. Naturally it affected your family very closely."

"Well, as to that, I s'ppose it did," Mrs. Arms answered reflectively. "But lor'! 't were a good thing fur us all round, though ye must no' mistake that I were glad it 'appened; far from that. 'E were a fine old man, were Mr. Somhers, sir, but 'e 'eld a tight rein an' Jim must caper lively to 'is bid."

"And your daughter. She was employed in the house, was she not?"

Mrs. Arms nodded.

"Aye, sir. 'T were her as saw the old man first, an' she's never been 'er old sel' sin'." She looked at me sharply. "Is it true, sir, as my nevvvy Joe 'Orsford said to Maggie this mornin' that you are a detective?"

"I am the new tenant of Overlook," I answered. "The boy who drove me up last night told me that I should be mistaken for a detective."

Mrs. Arms' eyes twinkled.

"Then Joeie were wrong again. Not as I cared if ye were one or not, for we 'ad nothing to do with the old master's death, though ye'd think as Maggie 'ad from the way she gets the ague when ye speak o' murder. She never were like any other gaerl I ever knew — sort o' notional, she is, an' full o' dreams an' fancies. I s'ppose ye came from a city?"

"From New York."

"N' York. I were there once when we come to America, Jamie an' Maggie an' me. I thought ye werna a country chap —— Hark! Wot were that? I do b'lieve t' were my Jamie comin' back."

She raised a shade and peered through the closed blinds.

"Aye; that's 'im — a 'andsome lad, now, is na 'im, my Jim?" She laughed. "Not as 'e's so much nor a lad no more, 'ither."

I followed the direction of the old woman's gaze, and caught a glimpse between the trees of a gray horse and a brown one wending their way down the road before an open wagon bearing a man of uncertain age. He was a surly-faced, dark-browed fellow I could see, even at that distance. To the mother's eyes, however, he was still her "'andsome lad!" I wondered what Maggie, of the apprehensive eyes and apple cheeks, thought about this brother. Did she know, or suspect, the truth about Mr. Somers' death? Did she, perhaps, believe Jim implicated, or was it only, as the mother appeared to believe, the shock of the crime that made it impossible for her to listen quietly to the subject?

She was hurrying out to the road at the moment, and met her brother at the entrance. That she spoke to him of my arrival I could not doubt, for, with a sharp turn of his head, he glanced toward the closed shutters behind which I stood. I saw his wide shoulders move in a derisive shrug; then he dismounted and, handing the reins to the girl, walked slowly to the house.

"Now, that was a funny thing fur Maggie t' do," meditated Mrs. Arms aloud, and she echoed my thoughts. "'T is no' as 'f she were fond o' takin' the 'orses, as now an' again she 'as to."

And she added in her odd mixture of Cockney and Lancashire dialects, as she regarded me with twinkling eyes:

"'Appen she 's a-thinkin' ye 're such a fine young man Jim 'd be a-wantin' to tidy hup a bit afore 'e come in t' ye."

But it was hardly probable that such was the girl's intention in meeting her brother, for he did not visit the pump or any other remote spot before he appeared before us.

"Ye wan' t' see me?" he asked abruptly, looking at me with unfriendly eyes beneath a pair of sinister brows. "Wot is it ye 'd 'ave o' me, sir?"

I handed to him Mr. Milbrath's note, which Horsford had returned. He read it through without a change of expression, and gave it back to me.

"It is fur my cousin, Joseph 'Orsford," he said.

"So I discovered upon my arrival last evening, but as you were so long a part of Overlook I have taken the first opportunity to make your acquaintance."

This remark elicited no response from Arms, and his manner implied that an acquaintance with me was neither solicited nor desired. I perceived that I had made a mistake in hurrying the matter, and regretted that I had not waited until later, then to approach him in the attitude of master toward servant, an attitude more nearly within the limits of his comprehension, probably.

I stared at him in grim silence, determined that he should respond in some way to my remark. We stood there facing each other with suppressed alertness. Mrs. Arms was grave and anxious, longing for concession on the part of her son, not daring to suggest it, and, withal, it seemed to me, somewhat puzzled by his attitude.

After an awkward silence he spoke:

"When I said good-by to Hoverlook I did n't expect to 'ave to 'ave anything more to do with it," he said ungraciously.

"Which means that you would prefer to have nothing to do with me?" I interrogated, with a smile. "In that case I will bid you good day, Mr. Arms."

The man threw me a swift glance, half suspicion, half question. It seemed as if with it he also half relented.

"Good day, sir," he answered civilly. "Perhaps hif you come again another week, when work is light, I'll 'ave a bit o' time to talk with you."

Mrs. Arms followed me to the door.

"You must n't mind Jim," she said in a distressed voice which harbored a puzzled note, "I

don't see what's the matter, sir. It his not like this that 'e his usually. Come again, sir. Do come. 'E'll be all right another time, I'll make sure. Next week the gooseberry wine'll be good. Come and try a bit, will you, sir?"

I reassured her with a promise, and, looking back at the turn in the road where the land lay higher, I saw that she still watched me.

A little farther on I paused in the shade of some trees. A breeze touched the land at that point, and I threw myself upon the ground, which was still cool. The Arms cottage was hidden from my view, but I could see the stable with its open door before which Arms was lazily unhitching. As I watched him, pondering on the meaning of his manner towards me, I saw Maggie come from the direction of the house. In her hand was a large straw hat, such as men wear who work in the field. She paused for an instant, as if in conversation with her brother, and then moved on, but slowly as if unwillingly, toward a small but dense grove beyond the place.

She was lost to my view for, perhaps, five minutes, and when she returned there was a man with her. I was too far away to get much idea of his appearance, but his carriage gave me the impression that he was a man near middle life, and one who would be well-dressed. He wore the hat which Maggie had taken out, and it completely hid his face from me.

CHAPTER VIII

ALMOST A HERO

THE noon meal was again served, in deference to me, I suppose, in the front room; but this time the square table was brought in from the kitchen and I dined with the family.

Mrs. Horsford was still silent, and her eyelids were red and swollen as if from recent weeping. Her husband had charge of the child, and I wondered whether it were his habit to care for it always when in the house. He looked grim, and barely spoke during the meal. To my remark that I had called at the Arms cottage, he merely looked at me and uttered a conclusive "Aye."

When we had finished, I followed him to the grain house, and by dint of many questions succeeded in learning the names and accredited characteristics of the postmaster, the banker, the physician, and the chief merchant of the town, whose assistance I thought it possible I might have occasion to seek. I also arranged with Horsford for the use of two horses and a man to care for them, and then proceeded to make myself acquainted with the grounds and environs of Overlook.

I found that starting from the sunken gardens to the northwest of the house a gravel path bordered the edge of the bluff and joined the twisting drive to the main entrance gates on the one hand, and

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on the other followed in and out among the trees that grew on the bank that sloped at this point to the water's edge.

Down there, on a pier that ran well out into the water, I found a boathouse, and one of the keys in the bunch that Horsford had given me fitted the lock in the door.

There were three rowboats inside, two of them dry and sprung from disuse, but one still gay with green and red paint and apparently seaworthy. On a wide shelf that outlined three sides of the room were fishing tackle, hooks, pails, et cetera; and near the middle of each side of the house was a window in the shape of a large porthole.

In my progress of inspection I had reached one of these windows, and as I glanced out idly my gaze was transfixed by an unexpected picture before me.

A hundred feet, or thereabouts, beyond the Overlook pier stretched another pier, likewise bearing a boathouse; and between the two lay a bit of sandy beach on which at that moment the rising tide was sending foam-capped waves.

Along this beach ran a young girl, clothed in white, with a white sunbonnet, and her dress was gathered to her knees above the whitest, roundest, daintiest ankles and calves that were ever, perhaps, bestowed upon mortal. Now and then she paused to dig a small pink toe into the sands, or to dare an incoming wave to break upon the polished marble of her ankle, screaming with lusty glee when it did so, and running on again out of reach of the next

encroacher. Once she turned a little, and I caught a glimpse of a pink and white face framed in the floating gold of her hair as the breeze caught the loosened tresses and blew them out.

I thought of the attractive girl on the train, and at once began to trace a resemblance between her and the wisp of humanity on the sands. Both had hair like captured sunbeams, and upon both had Nature bestowed her rare kiss of perfect coloring. What more likely than that they were sisters? I hoped they were, for already I had registered a vow that if she were stopping for long in Winton I would make the acquaintance of my High Priestess of Travel, and to have this pretty little one a member of the same family would simplify matters for me tremendously. I had only to ascertain to whom the neighboring pier belonged, secure a card from some responsible source — from Mr. McClure, perhaps, when I came to know him — and lo! I should have the privilege of looking again, and perhaps often, into a fair face, the expression of which continued to haunt my waking thoughts.

I watched the child as she ran lightly up the steps that led to the pier beyond me and disappeared within the boathouse. Then I turned away from my porthole with a feeling that she alone was worth the trouble of an introduction. To a lonely bachelor, destined to at least a month of solitary work in a doubtless uncongenial territory, the thought of feminine graces and a soft feminine voice, if embodied in only a child, is capable of inducing a thrill of pleasure.

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Her sunny hair and piquant profile reminded me of my cousin Nan; and if ever a maid of twelve possessed the gift of keeping the lives of those about her free from ennui, it was Nan. I laughed aloud with a recollection of some of the pranks of that pleasing miscreant, and the door, which at first withstood my insistent pressure, yielded at that instant with a suddenness that sent the sound of my amusement ringing in the outside air.

The first object that caught my attention as I stepped without, was the girl with the white sun-bonnet. Doubtless she had gone through the other boathouse, for there she sat on the end of the pier, dangling her feet blissfully above the frolicsome waters, and again inviting the waves that broke in a foam against the piles beneath the pier to wet her if they dared.

One glimpse I caught of wildly waving pink toes and tapering ankles as their possessor tried vainly to cover them, after a startled glance toward me. Then — I suppose she tripped on her skirt as she tried to spring up — there was a sharp cry and the girl fell backward into the water.

In less time than it takes to write it my coat and waistcoat were off and I was swimming madly against the waves in the direction of a white speck that bobbed upon the water. My progress was slow, for my clothing was heavy and my muscles not so firm as they would be later in the season, so I shouted to the girl to grasp a pile and keep her head above water. There was no answer, and my heart grew heavy with sudden fear. What if I should

be too late? I thanked God that the tide was coming in. Then I caught the bit of white. It was the sunbonnet, floating out by its loosened strings, and before it, in the shadow of the pier, was the girl, clinging to a pile, as I had instructed.

"Put your arm around me," I cried, as I threw my own left one about her slender waist.

"No," she said.

"Do as I tell you," I commanded. "Do you want to drown?"

There was a hesitation almost too brief to be noticeable; then a tiny hand grasped my arm.

"I can help myself a little bit, perhaps," a voice said, and had I been able I should have turned to see whether it were laughter or tears that brought that curious little break into the bell-like tones.

"Don't try," I said briefly. "Simply hold fast."

A dozen strokes brought us to the sands, and, lifting the child I carried her up the beach to a spot high and dry and beyond the possible reach of the water.

"There!" I exclaimed, as I sat her upon the sands. "Now, if you will tell me where to find your home I will see that you get there safely."

"Thanks! But I'm not going home just now. I'm — yes, I am going right back into the water and have a nice swim. I'm all wet anyhow."

"What!" I ejaculated. "Do you mean to tell me that you jumped into the water purposely?"

"Not exactly that," the girl answered with averted face, as she began to scoop out the sand before her. "I did n't jump in. Any one, *almost*,

would know that I am not dressed for the water; but I have a bathing suit in the boathouse and I *can* swim."

"Then, in Heaven's name, why did n't you say so?"

"Perhaps I should have said so if you had not been so — dictatorial; or maybe I should have set out ahead of you, but I happened to strike my forehead and — it hurt."

Her face was still averted. I could see only the sweep of the delicate features as I looked down upon them. But then I observed two things; that there was more ivory than coral in the beautiful cheeks now, and that an ugly lump had raised just above the right eye.

"Why, you poor child!" I cried, and was down upon the sands before her in a twinkling. "You must let me take you home directly. I insist upon it. Your mother will find something to reduce that swelling and save you a headache. Come, which way shall we go?"

"My mother is n't in Winton," said the girl with the same note in her voice that I had detected when we were in the water, and in that instant I became conscious that she was older than I had thought — probably sixteen — and she was laughing at me.

"It would, perhaps, be well if she were," I remarked, uncomfortable in the consciousness that I had been treating a girl on the edge of womanhood like a child not yet in her teens, but resolved to carry on the farce. "Headstrong children need to be looked after as carefully as young animals."

The girl made no response. For fully two minutes we sat side by side upon the sands and not a word passed between us. Presently, without looking in my direction, she began to shake out her wet locks.

"May I take you home?" I said then, and, you may observe, I asked it.

"No, thank you," she answered sweetly.

"Then will you go now that I may see that you start safely?"

She made a move as if to rise, but with a sudden glance at her clinging skirts sank back again.

"No," she said.

A light shone in upon my brain.

"You mean to sit here until I go?" I inquired, pleased with my extraordinary perception.

She nodded, and the dimples twinkled at the corners of her mouth. Her eyelids fluttered coaxingly, but were not permitted to lift.

"Oh! Very well. Then, good-by. I hope you will feel no bad effects from your plunge, and the bruise."

"Thank you; good-by," she answered, with unflattering promptness. "I hope you understand that I am properly grateful to you for — saving my life."

I laughed, and I knew that she wanted to.

"I understand, of course," I made answer. "Please think of me as a hero!"

I went to the boathouse and spent an unconscionably long time there in the hope that the girl would move away and I could learn at least the

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direction that she took. But when I locked the house she still sat where I had left her, and I was presently forced to permit the trees on the rising bank to shut her from my view as I returned to Horsford's cottage for a change of clothing.

The cottage was as silent as a churchyard when I entered it, and there were no sounds of life within it when I left it half an hour later. But as I reached the path around the sunken gardens I looked back and saw Mrs. Horsford, with the child toddling at her side, crossing the strip of green that lay between the cottage and the vegetable garden, where, doubtless, she had been. My first thought was to return to the cottage and question her about the things uppermost in my mind. Caution suggested a slower but probably wiser course, and I turned to the grottos, which I had come to examine.

There were two of them in the sunken gardens, and from a distance they looked like enchanted spots, fit for fairy habitation. The entrance in both cases was hung with trailing woodbine, but there the suggestion of romance ended, for one was but the hiding place for the pipes that had once brought water to the fountain, while the other was but two or three feet deep — a mere archway for the brick wall that banked the knoll above.

I seated myself on a rustic bench that stood near the larger grotto and presently my mind became absorbed by the case that I had taken in hand. The sudden pausing of a squirrel in his journey along the knoll above me roused me at last to a consciousness of my surroundings. I arose and stretched

myself and moved from the gardens. The sun was well behind the trees by this time, and the air had taken on that solemn stillness which descends upon the earth toward sunset in summer.

I felt glad that Gaspard was to arrive within another hour, and with the recollection I walked briskly toward the stable to ascertain whether Horsford had got the horse that he had promised to let me have at once.

As I passed the house it occurred to me that I had not yet dispatched my first report to Mr. Summerfield, due on the morrow. I let myself in through the creaking door in the south extension, and went to my bag, which sat upon the floor in one of the parlors, for paper, which I took to the tiny portico, and, using my notebook for a rest upon my knees, I sketched a brief statement of my movements during the past two days, so far as they were likely to be of interest to Mr. Philander Summerfield.

When I hurried back to the bag to return the superfluous paper, I found on the pile of things I had turned over to get at the paper — directly on top and so conspicuous that I could not overlook it, a half sheet of foolscap paper on which was typewritten in capitals,

ONE WARNING FOR A MAN,

TWO FOR A FOOL,

THREE FOR A CORPSE.

WILL YOU AWAIT THE THIRD, OR WILL
YOU LEAVE OVERLOOK?

With a flash of grim pleasure I felt for my pistol and loaded it. Then I slipped down to the floor and did my best to discover footprints. But a spirit, indeed, might as well have left the message so far as any trace of him was visible in that half light. I tiptoed around, careful to make no more mark than necessary in the dust upon the floor, in my endeavor to find a lamp that could be used. But the oil in each one had long since evaporated. The matches that I lighted gave me little assistance, and after ten minutes a small pile of charred bits of wood was all that I had to show for my endeavor.

When I loaded my pistol I was resolved upon searching the house, but after trying the outside doors and finding them all locked, save the one through which I had entered, and the cellar door not only locked but bolted from the inside, I abandoned the thought of going farther, and returned instead to the front of the house, baffled again and exasperated with myself for being baffled.

I drew from my pocket the warning of the morning. As I expected, the uneven edge of the more recent half sheet fitted exactly the torn edge of the earlier page, so I could harbor no doubt that they had been left by the same person. Had he, then, also been the author of the one left in New York? Evidently he had regarded this as the second. I had the first one in my pocket. That, too, was typewritten, but a glance sufficed to show me that the two were not done on the same machine.

Was it possible that two persons were interesting themselves to keep me away from Overlook? Was

it that the key to the mystery still lay here in a form so tangible as to be picked up by one so inexperienced in criminal detection as I, yet overlooked for two years by professional sleuths? How about Barney Rafferts, whose connection with the first communication I had first suspected and then dismissed from my mind as unlikely? Had he, at one time, been on this case?

Oh, to have been here at the time of the crime! To have met *then* the monkey-faced Arms, his dotting mother and his sister with the apprehensive eyes! And Horsford? What part, if any, had he played in the tragedy, or was he playing now? Was he, indeed, the agent of his cousin (or of some one else of whom I had yet to learn), a man who forced his wife to silence and who climbed through open second-floor windows to lay a tantalizing threat within twenty feet of my unsuspecting self?

But granting that Barney arranged the first message and Jim Arms was the author of the other two, why should Arms make an effort to prevent me from investigating on the spot a crime that came so close to his own life — unless, indeed, he were the one I sought? But it had been shown at the coroner's inquest and at both of Harrison Milbrath's trials, that during the afternoon of October 12th, James Arms, farmer, was in Providence, and did not reach home until after seven o'clock in the evening, before which time the lifeless body of Peter Somhers had been discovered.

CHAPTER IX

THE GIRL IN WHITE

GASPARD proved to be all that I had hoped of him, and within forty-eight hours after his arrival he had made me as comfortable in that "place of silence" as I had been anywhere in years. He was a stout-hearted little Frenchman, a veteran of the war of '70, without fear of any agency, human, diabolical, or, I fear, divine, and he laughed in the faces of the tradespeople who gravely informed him of the terrors that he was likely to encounter in his new abode.

With eager interest he listened to all that I could tell him of the crime, and he lamented audibly that he could not have been upon the spot at the time. Gaspard should have been a gendarme.

I gave him the freedom of the house, and more than once found him sleeping peacefully upon the couch where the body of Mr. Somhers had been found. Gaspard declared it to be the most comfortable couch in the house; and I doubt not that he had tried them all, for he worked like a galley slave and slept like a saint!

Within two days I had gone through, behind, around or under every visible article in the house from garret to cellar, and from private papers in Mr. Somhers' desk to a pair of blue jeans in an upstairs closet. Everything that Gaspard and I found

to be not stationary was shaken from its dust-laden quiet of two years and examined minutely.

Notwithstanding this care, at the conclusion of the investigation I had to admit that it had been fruitless in helping me to find a motive for the crime or a clue to the criminal.

I felt instinctively that the Arms family was somehow involved. But how? That either Maggie or her mother was directly responsible I could not believe. And as for Jim: even if it could be proved that he was at Overlook at the hour of the crime, would I gain much? Not unless I could find a motive for the deed. There was the legacy, to be sure, but did Arms know of that? Granting that he did know of it, was five thousand dollars enough, even to his ignorant mind, to pay for the risk? In case the legacy or his position became imperiled it might be. Proof that such a danger threatened would certainly warrant an hypothesis of his guilt.

I made this note in my diary:

If James Arms, late farmer of Overlook, is the man I seek, my deductions made from the report of the inquest and trials were wrong. No man of his muscular build would have dragged Mr. Somhers' body to the couch where it was found; nor do I believe that he would have taken the care that seemed to have been taken to cover the manner of the crime and protect the couch. But he is a man who will bear study, and I mean to accept the invitation of his mother to "come again," and before long too. That his manner was not that of impulse that other day I am confident, for twice since my first words with him I have met him on

the road to town and he has answered my greeting only with a gruff: "Aye, aye! Halong with ye, Betsey!" or "Be hon with ye, Sal!" as he touched his mares with his whip.

What can be the secret of such a man's popularity with, or shall I say power over, a man like Mr. Somhers?

I have begun a practice of visiting the post office each day, for it is there that the village idlers, whom I have come to call "the faculty," congregate, and the gossip of the place is dished up fresh and hot. I think that there I shall be able to get information, but I must be content to seek cautiously, gaining by scraps, for the villagers will close up like their own native clams once they divine that they are being questioned. Moreover, I am still regarded with curiosity and some doubt, and must move conservatively until I am a familiar character.

In the meantime I am coaching Gaspard. I have told him enough of my mission here to allay his curiosity, and after assuring myself of his loyalty and discretion, have instructed him to see as much of the Horsfords as he can and learn their version of the Somhers case, their feeling toward their cousin, Jimi Arms, and his family, and if possible, the meaning of the curious sounds I heard in the cottage the other night.

He has found the commission an uphill task, for Horsford is no less the sphinx with him than with me. Moreover, he has given Gaspard clearly to understand that he will not have him coming about Mrs. Horsford with his French blandishments. To me this is significant of one of two facts. Either the heavy, silent Horsford is capable of keen jealousy or, as I have conjectured, he is afraid of his wife's volubility. I say her

“volubility,” for the impression that she made on me that first evening still lingers, notwithstanding that whenever I have since seen her, the subdued tone of the following morning had been conspicuous.

Horsford apparently sees through the excuses I make to get a word with his wife, and regards my approach with eyes that invariably narrow.

Yesterday, quite incidentally, I learned where Mr. McClure lives. The Queen Anne cottage in magnificent grounds, that I have admired from a distance, is his, it seems. The entrance to the place is only just across the road from the east side of the triangle of woods — almost within shouting distance. I dare say it was the man himself whom I saw yesterday meandering around among the trees on the lawn, and feeding nuts to the squirrels. I was tempted to introduce myself at that time, but upon reflection decided to await Kilbourne’s arrival, which is set for Saturday evening.

It stands to reason that this McClure knew Mr. Somhers, and in all probability he knew him well, as men of Mr. Somhers’ type are not common enough about here, I fancy, to be ignored by him. . . . I believe that I’d better make Mr. McClure’s acquaintance at once, and not wait for the company of that uncertain Kilbourne. So here goes!

Whereupon, with a resolve — not unmixed, I’ll admit, with a thought of another introduction — I snapped the rubber band over the pasteboard covers of my pocket diary, and, rising from the grass where I had been writing in the shade of a great elm tree, I sauntered eastward.

At the entrance gates, however, the man I had

seen feeding squirrels drove through his own gates and jogged down the road away from me.

My plan thus frustrated, I turned toward the boathouse.

"If I may not call upon desirable old gentlemen," I soliloquized, "it is possible that circumstances will be kinder in the matter of a water trip. It looks as if there might be a breeze stirring out there, which is more than we can be thankful for here."

Then I recalled the girl with the white sunbonnet. I had made two efforts to learn her identity. I had asked Horsford. He looked puzzled and shook his head thoughtfully, finally answering that he knew of no such person. Gaspard was equally ignorant, but he assured me volubly that he would proceed at once to learn for me the fair one's name. I left him, therefore, to gather facts in his own way; for, being French, I knew him to be politic, and, being forty, I believed him to be discreet.

As yet he had imparted no news, and, as I strolled beachward, I was considering how I could hasten his investigations, when I was startled by an unexpected warble, clear and sweet, in the branches above me, or so it seemed.

What bird had notes like that! I craned my neck in the hope of catching a glimpse of the little fellow. But I saw only the cocked bright eye of a robin peering down into mine, and there was a long pause before the warble was repeated.

Then it came from a clump of trees ahead of me. Forward I hastened, only to find that the bird was still in advance of me. I pushed on, my head

thrown back, my eyes fixed on the interlacing boughs, my mind too absorbed in things overhead to think of the pitfalls into which my feet might stray.

Suddenly I was brought to earth, literally, for my ankle turned on a treacherous small stone in the path and I was thrown upon my knees in an attitude of supplication before a sapling maple.

Instantly a quickly suppressed feminine laugh greeted my surprised ears, followed by the swish of dress skirts and the swift patter of feet.

I was upright again in a trice, and running headlong in the direction of the footsteps, my mind again on the girl with the white sunbonnet. But I caught not even a glimpse of feminine robes; and, at the turn in the path where the walk from the lawn descended, I lost all sound of everything save the crunching of gravel beneath my own feet.

I was within fifty feet of the Overlook boathouse by that time, and after a moment's indecision I turned toward it. A glance at the pier which had been the scene of my heroic rescue showed me that the boathouse upon it was closed, and that there were no signs of life about.

As I loosened the green and red boat from its moorings, and dropped lazily into it, the echo of a laugh, musical, tantalizing and feminine floated down to me from the embankment. I started consciously and looked sharply before me; but the only living things that I could see were a chipmunk on a worm-eaten log, and a gull's wings outlined against the blue of the sky.

Half an hour later, while I lay flat upon my back

in the drifting boat and watched the fleecy clouds from the edge of my hat brim, I was awakened from a daydream by the sound of a bird's warble rising, it seemed, from the water near me. Cautiously I sat up and looked sharply about me, a new idea as to the "bird" illuminating my brain.

I had drifted down toward the lighthouse, and no craft was near me nor any bird in the air above me. But a quarter of a mile distant and hugging the shore of Winton neck, a small rowboat moved slowly. It was brilliantly white; and against the blue cushions in the high back of the stern, a solitary figure sat indolently — a girl in white, with golden hair shining in the sunlight in defiance of a white sunbonnet which had fallen to her shoulders!

In a flash, I comprehended the situation. There, in one, were my Undine, my warbler, and my damsel of the tantalizing laugh! She should not again escape. Moreover, in punishment for her amusement, she should tell me her name, or where she lived, or agree to permit me to call upon her when, by other means, I had learned both.

In the flush of this resolve I seized the oars and in a twinkling had headed my boat toward hers and was pulling vigorously. She still lolled against the cushions of her boat when, after a few strong strokes, I glanced over my shoulder toward her. But the next time that I looked she had taken her place between the locks and was lifting the dripping oars from the water. Then a low, rippling laugh came across on the breeze to me and, at the same instant, the little white boat shot away from my approach.

She pulled with a long, sure stroke that permitted no waste of energy, and carried her craft over the water at a speed that I was far from equaling. In my amazement at the sight I paused to stare for a moment, then I bent to my oars with redoubled vigor.

Notwithstanding my efforts, however, the tiny white craft kept at a tantalizing distance from me; and presently I was chagrined to see that only one chance to win remained for me. That one was to overtake her while a mooring was being effected. But with an aim that was unerring, as she neared the pier—the Overlook pier at that!—a rope flew out from Undine's hands and its noose fell deftly over one of the upright posts at the end. And, in a moment, that girl stood upon the pier, flushed and exultant.

I had dropped my oars, and, not more than a hundred feet from her, had whirled about upon the boat seat to face her. As she stood there for the fraction of a second I knew for a surety that she was my beauty of the train. Then the small, trim figure turned, waved a small hand in flaunting triumph, and with as much composure as if it were bound for church, walked toward and disappeared among the trees on the embankment.

Within a minute's time I, too, had effected a landing, and was again in hot pursuit. Up the bank I scrambled, regardless of everything but ultimate victory; as I reached the forking of the path, there, not more than a hundred feet before me, was a slender, white-clad figure and a white sunbonnet!

What was more, they were moving with an admirable lack of vulgar haste.

Triumphantly I gazed, for was not the object of my pursuit all but accomplished? Little did Undine suspect my nearness! Or could it be possible that she heard my approach and purposely loitered that I might overtake her? My speed slackened with the thought. If that were the case the piquancy of the situation was lost. I paused. Then a picture of the scene just enacted flashed across my mind. Those flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes did not indicate that effort had been made merely to give the loser an easy conquest in the end; nor did that proudly tilted head signify that he who would might walk up and take — even an acquaintance.

No; assuredly, Undine did not know of my approach. When I reached her, then, how was I to explain my conduct in following her beyond the pier where she had waved a distinct, if victorious, farewell?

With eager haste I looked about for something that would answer for a passport to her side; and Fate seemed to smile upon me, for there, shining in a shaft of sunlight, was a gilt hairpin. It was too absurdly trifling to notice, had I not been hard pressed; but in the urgency of the moment I picked it up thankfully and hurried forward with it.

"I beg your pardon!" I exclaimed in my most dulcet — if breathless — tones, as I gained the side of the bonnet, "I think you dropped this."

"Sure, sor, an' I think ye're mistaken," was the unexpected answer, as the bonnet turned toward

me and revealed beneath, not the delicate face of my distinctly American Undine, but the wide features and broad smile of a dark-haired daughter of Erin! "But I b'lave I know where it b'longs, an' I'm willin' to take charge of it," she added, and there was no mistaking her amusement.

The blood tingled the roots of my hair and effervesced down my spine, and I was conscious of wondering whether it betrayed me through the tan on my face. Sheepishly I put the insignificant scrap of wire upon the girl's outstretched palm, and with an embarrassment that I felt was expressed in every feature and muscle, I raised my hat and turned away.

A trap had been set for me, and I had fallen into it with a promptness that must have been wonderfully gratifying to the owner of the white sunbonnet; for I did not doubt that Undine had afforded herself some additional amusement and triumph by making that girl — doubtless her maid — her temporary representative, trusting to a man's notorious lack of observation as to details of feminine attire to carry through her plan and make her escape.

I stole a glance backward and confirmed my surmise. No one but a man with one idea would have walked into a snare so obvious, for sunbonnet and height were the only features that the two girls had in common. Not only was this girl stouter than Undine, but her gown was in stripes of black and white, and she wore a large apron!

All that day the little white boat rocked demurely by the side of mine on the rising waters at the

Overlook pier; but the following morning, when I went down for an early row, it was gone, and looking to my neighbor's pier I beheld it moored there, pleasantly suggestive of its fair occupant of the previous day.

CHAPTER X

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

SATURDAY being the day that the usually indolent male Wintonites assisted their women folk to kill and dress chickens, bring in vegetables, mow the lawn, and otherwise make ready for the approaching day of rest, I found most of the chairs deserted upon the post-office piazza. I remained, therefore, only long enough to read a short letter from Harrison Milbrath, in which he inclosed a card to Mr. McClure, whose acquaintance, he suggested, I might find both helpful and agreeable.

I had ridden to town, and as I cantered back, the charm of the day fell over me like a spell. Every breath of the clear air sent the blood tingling through my veins and encouraged my desire to play truant for a few hours. At the turn where the road from Clintonville comes into the main street, I threw off the last remnant of responsibility, and galloped gladly into a section of country where hitherto I had not traveled.

I had gone for perhaps a mile inland when, of a sudden, a clear, sweet warble fell upon my ears. On the instant I drew rein and listened. It came again presently, and was followed immediately by an amused laugh, unrestrained and melodious. Craning my neck in the direction of the sound, I

beheld the prettiest sight that had been vouchsafed me in many a day.

On a stone wall that outlined a pasture sat my Undine, in white, as before, the little white sunbonnet for once upon her head but tipping away from her face. That the warble was intended for a horse became apparent, for a soft whinny answered each sound and a fine black animal, side-saddled, raised her head for an instant from the billows of clover in which it was buried, and took a few encouraging steps toward the dainty figure upon the wall.

The girl flicked the tips of her small feet with her riding whip, and, apparently, forgot the horse. A retrospective smile played about her mouth and as she warbled again and again and laughed aloud, I had an uncomfortable presentiment that I was the subject of her mirth. The horse lifted one ear questioningly and whinnied.

"I don't want you, Mercedes," the girl cried merrily. "I was illustrating how easy it is to delude big, wise men. *You* would n't be so easily fooled, now would you? And as for Delia, why, you would know her from me at quite the distance of a half mile, to be sure you would, Mercedes, dear!"

If the blood had tingled through my veins when the unexpected "Delia" beamed upon me from the rim of the white sunbonnet, it burned its way through them now.

Undine undoubtedly believed herself to be far from any human being, and her laughter and words were as free from malice as the song of a bird; but

had she studied a way to punish me she could not have devised a more conclusive method. I was alternately incensed and mortified, and (let me express my opinion), mortification is the surest way to humble and floor a man. I was of a mind to ride forward and surprise the small pink ears of Miss Undine, when discretion warned me that I was only an eavesdropper. My horse, disapproving of indecision, settled the matter for me by stamping vigorously; and, quick as a flash, the girl turned a startled glance of recognition upon me.

Of all things that could have happened, to be caught sitting there upon that stationary beast, my eyes riveted and my face blazing, was assuredly the least desirable. I lifted my cap, and, jerking up my conscienceless horse, rode forward. With a sharp trill that brought "Mercedes" instantly to her side, the girl scrambled to her feet upon the wall, flung herself into the saddle, and, before I reached the spot where she had been, had galloped through the pasture and was out upon the road a quarter of a mile away from me.

She had deliberately and literally fled before my approach. Very well. What did I care? That I did care, however, the angry thumping of my heart betrayed. I dropped to the ground and stretched at full length on a shaded bit of grassy roadside at the foot of the wall. It is absurd to have both a miserable mind and an uncomfortable body on such a day. My hand, reaching out, touched something that was neither grass nor stone. It proved, upon examination, to be a locket of gold,

and heart-shaped. A chain of tiny links was attached to it, and so weak was the fastening, I understood how the trinket had succeeded in escaping from its owner's neck.

Some engraved letters on its face formed one short word: "Dolly." So that was Undine's real name? My fingers must have touched a secret spring, for the top flew open and I found myself staring at two pictures set within. One was Dolly, laughing, mischievous, *sans* the bonnet. The other was the face of a lad of perhaps eighteen, with merry eyes and a laughing mouth. But the curves of the nostrils and the moulding of the fine chin and lips revealed a sensitiveness of makeup which, at best, is but a doubtful blessing to a man. For an instant I thought that I knew the face, but a close inspection failed to bring me any recollection of where I had seen it.

Slipping the locket and chain into my coat pocket I remounted my horse. Would I, after all, hurry them back to their owner? Why not keep them until opportunity afforded a correct introduction to the high-headed young woman?

I set forth with a final decision to let Fate work out the solution to suit herself. If the paths that Miss Dolly Undine and I saw fit to travel again crossed that morning, very likely I would restore the locket; otherwise —

I did not turn at the crossroads, as I thought that probably she had. Resolutely I turned my horse's head toward Beverly. Half a mile farther on Fate applauded my action and bestowed her reward; for



"I had dismounted and held before her the locket."

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there on a boulder under a tree by the side of the road, sat Dolly, feeding sugar to her horse!

That time I did not draw rein until I was at the side of the girl. Then, before she had time to do more than spring to her feet and express amazement and defiance in the sudden straightening of her lithe young figure and the proud tilt of her head, I had dismounted and held before her the locket, dangling from its chain.

"Oh!" she cried, and one hand flew to her throat. "It was gone —— And you found it! You were trying ——" She abandoned her sentence, and her face dimpled with a most engaging smile. "It was very good of you," she murmured. "Thank you so much."

"It is a pleasure to me," I answered with commendable dignity. Then I spoilt the effect at once. "We seem destined to meet," I added.

Miss Dolly grew quite an inch taller before my admiring eyes, and she glared at me haughtily. Then she bowed stiffly.

"Good morning, sir," she said, and turned to her horse, which had succeeded in browsing its way several feet ahead.

So this was the way that I was to be left, was it? A "thank you" and not another kind word.

"Wait till I get myself 'a damp, moist and unpleasant body' again, pulling *you* out of the briny deep," I volunteered.

The girl wavered, glanced doubtfully over her shoulder at me, and then laughed softly.

"I don't mean to be hateful," she said, turning

back, and her manner became suddenly adorable. "I don't feel so a bit, you know."

Both eyes sparkled as she lifted them for a fraction of a second to mine, and a smile curled the corners of her scarlet lips.

"It *was* a kindness, too, for you to help me ashore that time," she conceded.

"Of course it was," I retorted, and I added wickedly: "Particularly to your parents, who probably do not realize how many risks you take."

The girl laughed, but she also flushed.

"I understand, of course," I continued, "that you fancy that you can swim, but I have had no proof of it, and I still insist that it is not safe for children to go too near the big pond alone!"

"You are a highly impertinent man!"

"And, with your permission, you are an exceedingly charming, if uncomplimentary young — child."

The blood swept in a flame over the girl's features, and she swished her riding whip sharply across the heads of clover at her feet. Then, the flash of temper spent, she laughed aloud and came toward me with outstretched hand.

"Let's 'shake and make up,'" she suggested. "I know that you are only teasing me, and I won't stay angry. But, really, you are shockingly ill-mannered to — to speak to me in that way. Why, you know nothing about me, not the first thing, if you really believe me to be a child, whereas I have the advantage of being quite well acquainted with you — Mr. Elmer Bliss!"

I stared in amazement. How came she to know my name? Second thought showed me that the fact was not remarkable. Doubtless by now everyone in Winton knew the name of the new tenant of Overlook; and she had first seen me at the Overlook pier (unless she remembered having seen me on the train — which I doubted), later in an Overlook rowboat, and at present with a horse owned by the farmer of Overlook. What more natural than her conclusions?

I raised my hat and bowed low before her.

“Even so, M’lle Dupin,” I said. “Your humble servant, Elmer Bliss, late of New York, living at Overlook, very preoccupied — on the way to the beach — very ——”

“Heroic,” supplemented the girl with an amused laugh. “But my wide knowledge of you does not end even with the facts that you have enumerated, while you know so little of me that even my name is a mystery.”

“It is Dolly,” I responded promptly.

“Ah! Here is a man with the wisdom of Solomon!” mocked the girl, still amused, as she slipped the telltale locket into her pocket. “Has it not occurred to you that the name on the locket may be that of a friend? Possibly, though, Mr. Bliss is not aware that it is a custom with girls to exchange pieces of jewelry for a time.”

“I fancy they take out the photographs in the lockets they loan,” I answered at random, and was wholly unprepared for the effect that my words had upon the girl.

Her eyes dilated and her hand flew to the hidden trinket.

“ So! ” she exclaimed in tones that expressed both injury and contempt, “ Mr. Bliss has been playing the part of Paul Pry, has he! ”

And before I had time to make myself heard, she had again called Mercedes to her, had sprung from the boulder to her saddle, and was enveloped in a cloud of dust as she galloped madly down the road.

Well, girls are incomprehensible creatures. Men who assert that they are not have more conceit than knowledge. This girl was no exception.

I was sufficiently puzzled to be certain of only one thing: that I was guiltless of any intention to distress her, and I should make no further efforts to become acquainted with Miss Dolly Undine!

With which resolve I mounted my horse and rode slowly back to Overlook.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRET OF THE HORSFORDS

MURRAY KILBOURNE, as good as his word, arrived on Saturday evening, but not in his most amiable frame of mind. It was dusk when he reached Overlook. He insisted, nevertheless, on prowling around the grounds, uttering now and then a delighted growl as his keen eyes discovered some especially tempting nook or vista, and impetuously declared his intention of bargaining for the place the moment his forthcoming novel proved as great a money earner as his publishers predicted. He was less enthusiastic about the house; but his criticisms were directed chiefly against the modern furniture, which he considered out of harmony with the building's colonial architecture.

He listened with a slightly wearied expression to an account of my experiences in connection with my new work, which I was determined he should hear although I knew almost at once that his absurd prejudice against Mr. Milbrath had not been effaced, and that I could expect little, if any, encouragement or help from him. Indeed, I doubt whether he even heard all that I told him, but his imagination was touched by the warnings.

"Jove, Bliss!" he cried with a flash of interest, "There is spice there! No footprints in the dust either time?"

"In the forenoon they were brushed out. In the evening I could distinguish nothing, but on the following morning I found tracks everywhere."

"Everywhere?"

"In both parlors, in the library, in the hall, and even part way up the stairs I found them. There was no attempt to obliterate them."

"Did you get a copy?"

In answer I handed Kilbourne a paper upon which I had outlined the imprint of a medium-size, square-toed boot.

Kilbourne studied the sketch for a moment.

"And the owner of the boots? Have you seen him?"

"Not with square-toed boots on. The feet are the first thing that I have looked at in a person for the past two days."

"When you see him you will scarcely know him by that sign, I think."

"I have thought of that. It is obvious that on the first occasion he wished to cover up all means of identification, and in the second instance he purposed to be seen. The inference is plain. Nevertheless, I can't help looking at toes."

Kilbourne laughed.

"Well, you are not likely to do any harm by that form of investigation," he said a little cynically. "Where did your mystery exit the second time?"

"Via the entry door, most likely. It was unlocked when I returned with Gaspard that evening."

"Ah! Which showed that he was in the house when you left it!"

"I fear so," I answered meekly.

"Jove! Your man within earshot and you permit him to slip through your fingers! Oh, you'll be a famous detective yet, lad!"

I made no response.

"Where is young Milbrath?" Kilbourne asked after a moment.

"Still at Manhattan Beach, I suppose. He sails on Wednesday, you remember. Surely you are not trying to connect him with this warning tomfoolery?"

"He might not be so bad a subject for a bit of theorizing."

"Oh, come now! Why, I had a note from him yesterday, mailed in New York at the very hour that I found the last warning."

"Is an assistant an impossibility?"

"How unlike your usual logic," I said with some heat, "notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Milbrath has offered me an inducement to track down his uncle's slayer, and despite his willingness to have me come to Overlook you think he is the man I am after."

"On the contrary," drawled Kilbourne, delighted to get me excited, "if he were the criminal he would scarcely object to your presence here, I should suppose, for are you likely to learn anything about him that has not already been paraded by the courts? Granting, however, his innocence, there may or may not be a reason, which has occurred to him since he

saw you, why he does not wish you to make your residence in this house. Indeed, if I remember correctly, he even suggested at your conference that you would be more comfortable at the farmhouse."

"Nevertheless I cannot connect him with these notes," I said obstinately.

"Well, I don't insist that it is necessary. However, I think it is as reasonable a conjecture as yours that Horsford is connected either with the crime or with the warnings."

"Then how do you account for his manner, and for what I heard in the cottage?"

"That I will answer later. He may be a bit of a domestic tyrant, but I have a theory which covers the whole ground, and I will prove or disprove it before I leave here on Monday."

The following morning, which was Sunday, Kilbourne's room was vacant when I left mine. I was somewhat surprised by this, for I knew that a habit of early rising was not among Kilbourne's virtues. I concluded, however, that the crisp salt air and the prospect of exploring without interruption various corners left unseen on the previous evening had been the allurements.

When, however, nine o'clock passed and Kilbourne had not been seen, I confess to having felt a curious anxiety as to his whereabouts. As I entered the dining room I recalled what he had said about probing the Horsford matter and I instructed Gaspard to go down to the cottage and see whether Mr. Kilbourne was there or had been there. Then I returned to the portico to await Gaspard's return.

Presently, I caught a glimpse between the trees of a man walking briskly along the gravel path that bordered the sunken gardens at the northwest. He was coming toward the house, and for an instant I thought it was Kilbourne. Directly, however, I saw my mistake. The man was a stranger and was clad in overalls. I recalled that Horsford had referred to a helper who would be coming shortly, and decided that this was probably the man. But I was curious as to why he was coming to the house instead of transacting his business with Gaspard, whom he must have passed a few feet back. At that instant the stranger disappeared, and I hurried into the house and to the back door, expecting to find him awaiting me. To my surprise there was no one there, or anywhere about, and I followed the path around to the portico without seeing the man. I decided that he had left the gravel path and made a cut to the highroad through the triangle of woods. But I could not see what would possess anyone coming from the cottage to take such a roundabout way of getting out of the grounds.

I was about to put off in the direction he must have taken to satisfy myself that he was there, when Gaspard returned. Mr. Kilbourne had not been seen at the farmhouse, and Gaspard had been turned down frigidly by the laird of the cottage. He was smarting a little as a result, for Mrs. Horsford had been more gay and talkative than ever before to him, and his fancy had flown high for a moment that he could get some information for me.

I listened to Gaspard's chatter, only half heeding

it, for the feeling of anxiety concerning Kilbourne had returned. I made a somewhat hasty disposition of the breakfast, and just as I was folding my napkin Kilbourne entered the room, radiant from his usual morning "dip" and faultlessly attired.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with animation as his quick eye took in the situation, "I have to beg your pardon for keeping you on tenterhooks as to my whereabouts. But I have done a day's work, lad. I have redeemed my promise. Behold the possessor of the Horsford family skeleton."

"The deuce you are! They told Gaspard that they had not seen you."

"You can't always tell a man by the clothes he wears," parodied Kilbourne gayly. "By Jove, man, I'm all but famished!" And he set himself with deliberate concentration to the matter in hand.

I realized the uselessness of questioning him until his inner man were appeased, so I ordered another cup of coffee and over it discussed impartially various commonplaces. When Kilbourne had finished breakfast, and we had lighted cigars and strolled to the portico, I said:

"And now about your before-breakfast exploit, Kilbourne?"

Kilbourne appeared not to hear. He leaned against a pillar and looked out toward the bay where a few white-sailed boats rode merrily in the sunlight.

"By the way," he remarked presently, "who's that deuced pretty girl who stores her boat next door to yours?"

"How, Mr. Murray Kilbourne, do you know that there is a pretty girl who stores her boat next door to mine?"

Kilbourne smiled enigmatically.

" 'T is the early bird that catches the first worm,' you have heard. When I am in the country I have a habit of early rising."

"Ah! And so, also, has Miss Dolly Undine, I dare say!"

"Dolly Undine," repeated Kilbourne. "Surely her name is not 'Undine'!"

"So far as I know to the contrary it is."

Kilbourne stared at me.

"Deuced clever this morning, are n't we?" he inquired. "Well, if you don't know her name I can't expect you to tell it me — Mr. McClure ought to know her. By the way, I believe I'd better look up Mr. McClure. Will you take me over now?" And Kilbourne turned on me a mischievous look as he puffed out a mouthful of smoke.

"Certainly I will take you to Red Gable — that is the name of the McClure place — whenever you like. But first about Horsford."

"Oh, that is a tale soon told," Kilbourne answered carelessly. "Horsford stands in lively fear that you will learn of his wife's habits. As I surmised from your story, she drinks, and when in her cups is inclined toward suicide. Moreover, she wants to kill the child, as well. I fancy that Horsford has anything but an eventless life."

"Are such occasions frequent?"

"As often as a sister, as bad as herself, brings her the stuff from Clintonville."

In a flash, then, I saw the meaning of Mrs. Horsford's peculiarity of manner.

"If that is all there is to it, Kilbourne, why does Horsford object to having me here, or to having me go to the cottage?"

"I don't know unless he fears that any tenant may mean the forfeiture of his present profitable berth. I *know* he fears that his wife's weakness may cost him his place."

"But, Kilbourne, how did you learn all this?"

"Oh, come!" he said, with a laugh, running down the steps, "you promised to take me to Mr. McClure."

"How did you come by all this information?"

"Well, I dare say you noticed the man in blue jeans who walked up the back drive and around the sunken gardens an hour or so ago? You looked at him, at any rate."

"Jerusalem! Was that you, after all?"

"Yes, clever lad!"

"I suppose it is useless to ask you how you managed your game?"

"Practically so," answered Kilbourne soberly.

"The end justifies the means,' you know."

I had joined him on the drive by this time, and we crossed over to the cool, green grass of the lawn. After a little I said:

"Kilbourne, are you still of the opinion that Horsford is not connected with those anonymous messages?"

"I am," positively.

"And knows no more about Mr. Somhers' death than he would have us believe?"

"I hardly think he does."

"Kilbourne," I ventured presently, "the magic key to this whole miserable puzzle lies right here in Winton, of that I am confident. Could n't you manage to spend this week with me and help me find it?"

Kilbourne looked straight before him.

"I have n't a doubt about it," he answered, "but — I don't purpose to manage that way. Call me what names you will, but permit me to keep out of the zone of the Milbrath." He shivered slightly as he spoke, notwithstanding the warmth of the day.

We had reached the triangle of woods by this time.

"By the way, Murray," I said significantly, "Mr. McClure is quite as likely to be at home in the afternoon as in the morning, but I've learned by experience that Miss Dolly Undine prefers the forenoons for her outings. Still, we'll go to Red Gables now if you say so."

"Hang Red Gables!" responded Kilbourne, as he turned on his heel toward the beach. "We will see Mr. McClure this afternoon."

CHAPTER XII

THE MAGICIAN OF RED GABLES

OUR call at Red Gables resulted, to me, at least, in several surprises.

In the first place, Mr. McClure was much older than I had thought, and he possessed a charm which to this day I have not been able to analyze. It lay not in his appearance, for he was so plain as to be almost grotesque; not in his manner, for that was frequently abstracted; not in his sympathy, even, though that was as quick as in a tender woman. His smile was, indeed, the only tangible evidence of it, and that did not explain the spell under which all passed who came to know him.

Perhaps the secret of his fascination lay in his attitude toward life, in his almost child-like belief in the supremacy of those things that are good and wholesome and abiding; it may be that he radiated an atmosphere of faith. I know that he had the affection of all, and, in return, found some good in everything.

We found him under a tree on his lawn ministering to an assembly of squirrels. He recalled Kilbourne at once, with apparent delight, and assured me that any man who was Mr. Kilbourne's friend was his also. I had passed at once under the spell of the magician of Red Gables and, with Kilbourne, gladly followed to the wide veranda, where directly

we found ourselves in big chairs, our feet upon the veranda rail and our heads enveloped in smoke.

I was not long in learning that Mr. McClure and Mr. Somhers had been friends; and I soon found, also, that Harrison Milbrath could boast no stauncher or more sympathetic defender than Chauncey McClure; but Mr. McClure appeared reticent and perhaps distressed, on the subject of the tragedy, and as Kilbourne became gloomy and unsociable it was speedily shelved to await a more opportune time.

Mr. McClure had gone indoors for a volume which Kilbourne and he were discussing, when, of a sudden, the clatter of a horse's hoofs fell upon our ears, and directly a black mare that I recognized as Mercedes galloped like one possessed up the drive toward us, bearing upon her back — Dolly, of course, flushed, excited, laughing, her hair flying about her face and streaming out behind, and the sunbonnet, for once not even pretending to protect her, hanging from the horn of her saddle!

Too busy with my own thoughts to consider what the appearance might mean to Kilbourne, I stared joyously at the vision, as she quickly dismounted at the horse block and ran up the steps. Just then Mr. McClure appeared in the doorway, book in hand.

"Dolly! Dolly my dear! Will you never grow up?" he exclaimed, but his winning smile illuminated his features as he crossed the veranda to the girl's side.

She turned and threw herself into his arms, her own about his neck, laughing and mocking him

adorably. She had not seen Kilbourne and me, I know, for when she lifted her head from the old man's shoulder and her eyes encountered mine they distended almost with fear, it seemed, and she uttered a startled cry.

"Why, child, did you not know that we have callers?" Mr. McClure asked. "See, Dolly, my dear, I want these new friends of mine to know you. Gentlemen, this is my only living kin, my beloved granddaughter and housekeeper, Dolores."

Had I possessed even the wit of a mummy I thought in that moment I might at least have traced her to Red Gables. What place was more likely to share that tiny stretch of beach with Overlook? What other place, indeed, was near Overlook to share it?

In this brief interval of salutation and self-criticism, Miss Dolly had acknowledged our introductions with formal bows and an exceedingly grave countenance, but her manner toward me indicated no recognition. She disappeared directly, and I was wondering whether it were a part of her idea of propriety to begin an acquaintance with this meeting, when she returned, her hair coiled high upon her head, her dress skirt very long, her carriage very stately, and, in fact, once more my beauty of the train. She came directly to me.

"I want to ask your forgiveness for my words and conduct yesterday," she said smilingly, and stretched out a tiny hand which I grasped with unnecessary fervor. "I knew that I was wrong as soon as I stopped to think," she went on before I

could answer, "and I've been to the beach twice in the hope of seeing you and telling you so."

"Why, Dolly, have you and Mr. Bliss met before to-day?" Mr. McClure asked in astonished accents, and Kilbourne looked quizzical.

Dolly laughed, and going to her grandfather's chair she perched upon one arm of it.

"Mr. Bliss found my locket, grandpa, dear," she explained.

Mr. McClure's face instantly radiated a hundred lines of amusement.

"Ah!" said he, "then Mr. Bliss is the most recent victim of your pranks, child!" He lifted a warning finger.

"My granddaughter will bear watching, gentlemen," he cautioned smilingly. "For mischief when the mood is upon her, she is a veritable sprite. Pray do not take her too seriously at any time."

Dolly pouted bewitchingly, in protesting indignation; then smiled enigmatically, and, with consummate tact, directed the conversation from herself.

With as much skill, Kilbourne adjusted conditions to meet his ideas of enjoyment, with the result that presently I found, with a little thrill of jealousy, that I was sidetracked with Mr. McClure while Kilbourne had Dolly to himself.

"You have chosen a lovely spot for your summer's outing, Mr. Bliss," Mr. McClure remarked. I agreed with him so heartily as to bring a smile to his face.

"If there's a lovelier one on earth I'd like to see it," I answered. "But Horsford, the farmer,

assures me that the house is possessed of an evil genius and advises me not to live there."

Mr. McClure looked serious.

"Perhaps he is the originator of the sentiment against Overlook that appears to have taken root in the village," he said thoughtfully. "Doubtless you have observed it. Only yesterday the man who assists my out-of-doors man gravely informed me that the place was haunted."

"Did he say by what?"

"By the spirit of Mr. Somhers."

"Um! That is farther than Horsford went. He implied that there is a 'real ghost,' but it was to the atmosphere of mystery and danger that he referred. I dare say this man of yours has seen the ghost!"

Mr. McClure shook his head more solemnly than the occasion appeared to warrant.

"What *he* had to tell was merely hearsay. Some boys, including one of his own, ventured on a twilight game of 'hide-and-seek' on the lawn of Overlook, and at one of their 'counting-out' periods, when they were assembled, they distinctly saw the figure of Mr. Somhers approaching them."

"I'll warrant they did n't wait for him to reach them!" I smiled.

Mr. McClure did not respond to my mood. He continued as if he had not heard me.

"And a few weeks ago a story was going the rounds that on several occasions a light was seen shining from the windows of the library in the dead of night."

"The shutters of the windows were closed and locked on the morning of my arrival."

"They were closed, also, on the mornings following those occasions, as they had been on the evenings preceding them — so say the tale-mongers."

"Are such stories generally credited in the village?"

Mr. McClure gazed before him with curiously abstracted eyes. But he heard me, for presently he answered with a smile:

"That is difficult to say. Mr. Somhers' death was practically the first tragedy in the history of the village, and it shook it to its foundations. Since then Overlook has been regarded by many as a place of evil habitation. Indeed, it is natural, is it not, since the latent belief in the supernatural which is in all of us has been roused in Winton, that the more credulous, especially those who believed in Harry's innocence, should credit the rumors that Mr. Somhers has returned in spirit to avenge his untimely end?"

"I seem to have come unknowingly to a veritable 'palace of mysteries,' " I said.

"Nevertheless, I fear that from that standpoint you will be disillusioned," smiled Mr. McClure. "Take away all knowledge of its history and it must become one of the most delightful country places in New England. But this I believe, Mr. Bliss: If the dead have the power to return, to avenge their deaths where avenge is needed, to comfort those who mourn for them, or to help the living, Peter Somhers would come and set free that poor, sensi-

tive lad who is still bound by the chains of circumstance. He would hound the guilty to confession and bring restitution and comfort to those who have been wronged through his death. For that was his creed, Mr. Bliss, endurance to the limit, then — the old law, ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’ ” He paused, and for a moment seemed lost in thought. “There are, indeed, more things in heaven and upon earth than our philosophy dreams of,” he continued slowly. “It may be that a return is possible, in the semblance of the earth form, even. What proof have we that such is not the case, that Peter Somhers has come into possession of powers that permit him to avenge his death?”

Mr. McClure paused as if conscious that he had been speaking more to himself than to me. A deep fire glowed in his eyes as he turned them steadily to mine.

“In presenting theories not accepted by popular thought I am, I know, Mr. Bliss, endangering my reputation for conservatism,” he said. “It is only recently that I have indulged in speculation of this nature, but I have had an experience that sent my thoughts in channels quite out of their usual run. Wild as the statement may sound to you, it is a fact that I, too, this summer, nearly two years after his death, have seen the spirit of my old friend, Peter Somhers!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE VOICE OF BEELZEBUB

IT was impossible to doubt Mr. McClure's seriousness, and I regarded him with curiosity. Could it be that the old fellow was a bit unstrung mentally? But no. Impossible that eyes so clear and steady could mirror the fancies of an unbalanced brain. He had somehow been tricked; or, perhaps the case was one of illusion. One hears of instances of spirit manifestation, but does one ever verify them?

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, "you interest me. Will you be so good as to tell me the details of your experience?"

"Willingly," Mr. McClure responded promptly. "I have referred to it chiefly in the hope that it might be of assistance to you." He hesitated and regarded me momentarily with a questioning gaze. "But, for the present, at least," he continued, "I prefer that it should not become village property. It was just a week ago this evening that I paused by the gate yonder, as I often do in my walk, and looked beyond me to Overlook. The sun had been down for an hour, but a wonderful afterglow followed, and there was still enough light in the sky to bring out with distinctness the objects at the crest

of the knoll. Suddenly, as I gazed, the figure of a man became outlined against the sky between the rustic bench and the statue of Niobe."

Mr. McClure paused and his fingers moved as though the recollection of what he had seen distressed him, but in a moment he resumed:

"My first thought, naturally, was that it was some one connected with the place, Horsford, perhaps; but directly I recognized its resemblance to — to Peter Somhers. Its back was against the light and from where I stood its face was indistinguishable, but the build and carriage were unmistakable. Then, as I gazed, it vanished. It did not move away, it did not drop to the ground, so far as I could see, it simply disappeared. I crossed the road, and went through the grove to the house, thence about the grounds and to the cottage, but not a person did I see or a footstep hear. The following morning I examined the ground where the figure had stood, but the grass was short and even my own shoes left no marks upon it, so I gained nothing there. But, Mr. Bliss, the figure was not an illusion. Phantom or man it was real, and individual, and if it was not a 'materialization' some one on earth has a wish to give color to the sentiment against the place."

"Yes," I said, "I agree with you."

"And," declared Mr. McClure impressively, leaning toward me, "in that case we must apprehend the miscreant."

"Exactly."

Mr. McClure settled back in his chair with the

pleased air of one who has completed a difficult task satisfactorily.

"I have been sorely distressed because of my experience," he explained, "but now I am relieved. I have been at a loss to decide whether it is with the designing living or with the supernatural that the case should be classed. But as you are now occupying Overlook you will investigate, perhaps, more thoroughly than I could without exciting suspicion; and if you need any assistance, Mr. Bliss, remember that ——"

"Oh, grandpa McClure!" cried Dolly at that moment, "Mr. Kilbourne is that extraordinary man you used to tell me about! Oh, I know quite well" — to Kilbourne — "that you recovered grandpa's watch from an immigrant on the ship who had stolen into the cabin and taken it. And I've heard of the clever things you did to entertain the panicky passengers when a fire broke out in the hold. I used to sit with my eyes popping out and my mouth open when grandpa told those stories. You were quite the most wonderful man, I assure you."

Then the conversation drifted to Kilbourne's powers of observation and deduction, and Mr. McClure did not again that day mention his mysterious experience.

It was past nine o'clock when we took our departure from Red Gables, for Mr. McClure, seconded by Dolly, asked us to remain to tea, and Kilbourne, without reference to me, joyfully accepted the invitation. His spirits remained at top notch

all the evening, and it was with obvious reluctance that he left with me when I resolutely withdrew.

"We shall look for frequent calls from Mr. Bliss, since he is to be so near, and I hope, Mr. Kilbourne, that we shall see you in Winton very often this summer." Mr. McClure remarked heartily as we rose.

"I'm returning to Overlook next Saturday," answered Kilbourne — which was news to me — "and it is highly probable that I shall remain a week. Be sure that I shall come here as often as you will let me. You see, Mr. Bliss and I are working together. No — not literary, exactly — semi-scientific, I should call it — work that must be finished soon, and as Mr. Bliss is under orders to keep to the country during the heated term, it will doubtless fall to my pleasant lot to come out to him."

"Why! why! I should never have dreamed that you were in a doctor's care, Mr. Bliss," exclaimed Mr. McClure. (Nor should I, was my mental comment.) "You *look* so thoroughly well. I hope you find that the Winton air is benefiting you?"

"It is all, and more, than I hoped for," I answered truthfully; and I assured him that my trouble was a mere nothing, a tendency to heart weakness being my chief difficulty — a remark that brought a sharp glance from Kilbourne, but appeared to leave my host and his fair granddaughter in doubt as to my seriousness.

But Kilbourne had the last words with Dolly, and before he left he had extracted from the old gentle-

man an invitation to spend the afternoon and evening at Red Gables on the following Sunday.

When we were on the highroad, Kilbourne drew my arm through his.

"You look weary, lad," he said. "A sick man should be abed by this hour."

"Hang your humor, Kilbourne! Suppose we change the subject?"

"Certainly. What charming people, the McClures. Let me thank you for putting me in the way to see more of them — permitting me to ask myself up again, you know."

"Oh, well, you're welcome!"

"Sounds cordial! I'm accustomed, however, to contained expression on the part of your excellency; I know therefore that you mean — Holy smoke! Is that one of the novelties you offer visitors?"

A cry broke upon the air, not loud at first, but penetrating, and so unusual as to be unclassifiable. Was it of rage or of pain? Or was it a laugh? It rose, trembled and broke; and it was not repeated.

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Can Gaspard have gone suddenly mad?"

We hastened up the drive, our eyes fixed on a glimmer of light that flitted from room to room on the ground floor of the villa. When we reached the portico entrance we found Gaspard on the other side of the screen door, a lamp in one hand, a cocked pistol in the other.

"You heard it, m'sieus; zee — vat it vaz? — zee laugh, zee cry? A cra-zie homme I thought I vould see."

"Where was it, this — noise?" I asked.

"Ici. In zis ve'y maison, m'sieu."

"Are you certain it was *in* the house?"

"Oui, m'sieu, here."

"Have you looked?"

"All vhere — zis chambre, zat chambre, up zee stairs, down zee stair; oui, all vhere. Zere vas no one, m'sieu. It was zee voice of Beel-ze-bub; it could be no other! Or of zee dead!"

"Nonsense!" I cried sharply. If at this late day Gaspard were to get notions of the supernatural into his head I should, indeed, have a fine time.

"Come," said Kilbourne, taking the lamp from Gaspard and instructing him to light the one that hung in the hall. "Let us see for ourselves. Better get your revolver, Bliss," he added in an undertone. It took but a moment to act upon his suggestion.

"Gaspard tells me that the house is locked except for this door, and he will stay by it until we return," said Kilbourne. "With your permission we will lock every room as we leave it. Have you a key ring?"

I produced one and we went through the house room after room, not omitting the attic and cellar, looking under beds, behind bureaus and in boxes and closets. Everything was in place, and save for our own footsteps and the ticking of a clock, everything was as silent as a desert. Then we made a *détour* of the grounds, but we returned no wiser than we went.

"It is probably not worth while to look for foot-

prints," remarked Kilbourne. "The ground is too dry to take a light impression, and no sane person would think of moving on the crunching gravel when there is so much sod."

"You think, then, it was a sane person?" I asked foolishly, and was rewarded by a contemptuous glance from the corner of my friend's eye.

"It seems to me it would be wise for you and Gaspard to go down to the cottage and see that all is well there," he said as we reached the house. "I will remain here, with your pistol, if you please, and that lamp, Gaspard, until you return."

The cottage was in darkness. I roused the Horsfords, however, and learned that Mrs. Horsford was herself and not responsible for the noise and that it had not been heard down there, and Gaspard and I returned to the house.

"Ten to one you'll find another warning in the morning," prophesied Kilbourne, stepping into my room an hour later as we were preparing for bed.

"You think that the cry came from the warner?" I asked with attempted wit.

"Aye; there is some one who has sad need of getting you from Overlook, and when you find him you will know who sent the anonymous notes, and, perhaps, who killed the old man Somhers."

"But where does he stay, Kilbourne?"

"You have me there. Jove! if it weren't for that Milbrath, I'd go into this thing with a relish. You have some very unusual and interesting features to work upon, lad, and I envy you. There is one thing that you can count upon," he went on

after a pause. "If a warning is left here to-night the one who leaves it had a pass key, or ——"

"Yes, or?"

Kilbourne's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"That Gaspard has spotted the man — 'Beelze-bub!' "

CHAPTER XIV

HUTTON GOSSIPS

ON the following morning Murray Kilbourne left Winton a disappointed man in one particular. He had hoped to find a warning, and there was none.

"My theory is the same, nevertheless," he declared stoutly. "Find who uttered that cry and you will find the author of your anonymous communications, and, *probably*, who murdered Somhers."

"Remain, Kilbourne, and help me find him."

Instantly Kilbourne's manner of alert interest changed to one of indifference.

"There's nothing about the case that attracts me," he said languidly.

"Nonsense! You spoke differently last night. Be frank with yourself to-day and admit that it is only that you have a prejudice against young Milbrath."

Kilbourne shrugged his gaunt shoulders.

"As you will. Let it be understood, however, that my return at the end of the week will have nothing to do with the case."

"Very well. You need not distress yourself lest I forget. I will trouble you with no further details."

Kilbourne stared at me meditatively, but made no comment then.

"I hope you'll have more charity in your heart for me by Saturday," he said soberly at parting. "I don't mean to be such a bad fellow and a selfish lout. It's no doubt a pity that the Lord gave me instinct. I can't see that the results of my pre-science are usually much to my advantage, if to anybody's."

That declaration, so lamentably true, rang in my ears as with abstracted eyes I watched the train until it rounded the curve and vanished into the marshland.

Then I turned to find myself again the only passenger on the platform and the station master standing in the doorway, his face wearing the same expression of shrewd curiosity I had observed on it the evening of my arrival.

"Howdy?" he said cordially, touching his cap. "Your frien' got an early start."

I assented.

"N' Yo'k?"

"Yes."

"Gol! It'll be derved hot there to-day! Live there?"

"Most of the time. He will be out to see me again soon. Winton goes ahead of New York at this season."

"You bet your life! I s'ppose you're enji'-ing yourself up to Overlook?" Hutton's blue eyes brimmed over with curiosity as he put this question.

“I would not exchange it for any other place that I know of.”

“Hum! That must be sayin’ a good deal,” dryly. “When you come I thought you’d be returnin’ about now.”

“Why?”

“W-all, I thought you was here on biz’ness that would n’t take long, for one reason. I did n’t take much stock in what you had to say about rentin’ the place. Say, sit down a while on that bench. It’s a purty nice lookout and comfort’ble enough till the sun gets over the high mark.”

I promptly accepted the invitation, and we seated ourselves under the bow window of the ticket office where we could hear the click of the telegraph instrument.

“There’s another train along ’n about half an hour, an’ then I can close up shop an’ go home till about noon. ’Tain’t safe to be away when the machine in there’s liable to talk.”

He declined with a nod the cigar I held out. “A pipe’s the only thing that puts me right with the world,” he said. He filled a clay specimen and puffed at it somewhat surreptitiously, prepared to dispose of it on the instant of another arrival.

There was a pause.

“Curious, ain’t it,” he remarked presently, “how things come ’round a man’s way? Now, when I was a little chap I l’arned how to work and read that little talkin’ machine in there just fer the fun of it and, w-all, because, too, I was crazy sot about everythin’ that had t’ do with railroads. Tele-

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graphs, and railroads, too, for that matter, was rare things in them days up in Vermont where I come from. Know *I* lived up to Overlook once?"

"No. When was that?"

"Just six years ago last June it was I left. I used to take hull charge of the grounds, and the sunken gardens was my pride, now I tell you. The house we had was tore down when old Mr. Somhers put on the library. He let all the help go that year but Arms, who was farmer then." Hutton paused to meditate. "That was the year people over town way would have it Mr. Somhers was crazy. You see he got workmen from Boston, or somewhere, to do his job. That was what started folks a-talkin'. An', then, when he said nobody must come to Overlook till the hull work was done, that put some of the finishin' touches on. He said there was din-i-mite aroun' an' he would n't have folks blowed up. Nobody just b'lieved that was his real reason, though, as before that he 'd been so liberal-like with Overlook, lettin' anyone that wanted to go all over the grounds. Then, when Job Peters an' his son ventured to drive in there one evenin' and Mr. Somhers flew into a fit about it, folks just *knew* he was off."

"All this happened six years ago when he added the wing that is now the library, you say? Had the house only one wing before then?"

"That's all; the north un. Everybody thought the house ware big enough fer them two — just the old man an' Harry — as 't was, but Mr. Somhers said that when the gals was switchin' about doin'

their work he could n't hear himself think — he was that narvous — an' he 'd build himself a room where he 'd not hear *everythin'* a-goin' on."

"He got a fine room for his trouble. I dare say you saw it when it was finished?"

"No; I never did that. You see I had a little trouble with Arms before I left, an' I never thought seein' that room inside ware wuth goin' to see *him*."

"I went to see him the other day, but he did n't want to know me, it appeared, and turned me down."

Hutton's eyes opened wide.

"He did!" he cried in amazement. "Now, that's a new wrinkle fer Arms. He's usually mighty handy in takin' up with newcomers, though Lord knows he's grouchy enough most times with his old cronies." He paused thoughtfully. "It's that five thousand maybe," he continued presently. "You know, I've always been surprised about that leg'-a-cee, fer I know fer a fact old man Somhers and him did n't get along good together for a long time back — hardly at all after the time Jim took Harry over to O'Conner's saloon in Clintonville. Gosh! How upsot Mr. Somhers ware! I heard a little he said to Jim about that, an' I thought he was crazy then."

"That must have been a long time ago."

"Oh, a matter 'f ten or 'leven years, I sh'd s'ppose. I allers wondered why Mr. Somhers kept Jim on the place arter that."

I wondered, too. That must have been in the early years of Arms' reign at Overlook.

I said tentatively:

"His mother and sister must take Jim's ways to heart; they seem to be nice women."

"Oh, Maggie an' the ol' woman 're all right, but 's fer seein' wrong in anythin' Jim does, that's all bosh. He 's so much better 'n the ol' one's old man ware, accordin' to her tell, he 's an angel beside him."

"There are two kinds of angels, I was taught."

Hutton looked at me shrewdly and laughed. At that instant the telegraph instrument began to call and at the same time a carriage drove up to the town side of the station with a number of passengers for the incoming train, and Hutton rose.

"You bet there air," he said wisely as he pocketed his lighted pipe. "But angels who ha' tied up all they're s'posed to have in one white house an' a truck farm which they don't work enough to live off 'f, yet have rolls o' bills — an' no little ones, neither — to show aroun' an' spend every little while, don't b'long to that class that's s'posed to wear white robes and play on gold harps, now do they?"

CHAPTER XV

WHO IS LA COUR?

HUTTON'S gossip gave me food for a new train of thought as I jogged into the village on my homeward trip. With the villagers I agreed, that "din-i-mite" about was scarcely reason enough for Mr. Somhers' strenuous objection to visitors at the time the south wing was being constructed, but his conduct in the Peters case convinced me that if the old gentleman was mad, it was a madness born of fear, and passed with the completion of the addition.

Such a supposition led to but one conclusion: that there was a secret in the construction of the wing which was shared with him and the stranger workmen only by Arms and, quite probably, by Mr. Milbrath. That Milbrath should be a confidant seemed natural, but why Arms alone of the five servants? Why were the others, as faithful and as long in Mr. Somhers' service, dismissed and James Arms retained? A new hypothesis for Arms' present conduct began to shape itself in my mind.

I was at the village post office by this time, and found that the usual number of idle villagers adorned the piazza. I joined the loungers and happened upon a scrap of information that I decided

might be turned to use in straightening out the tangled web I had in hand.

There was a mysterious stranger, it seemed, who, according to rumor, called upon Mr. Somhers on the day of the tragedy. A Beverly hackman of the name of Jandyce averred that he had driven him to the gates of Overlook. Mr. Jandyce's fare was not, however, considered by the intelligent police of Beverly County to be of sufficient importance to look up, notwithstanding the emphatic assertion of the house servants that no caller was admitted by them to Overlook on the day of the murder. Indeed, Mr. Jandyce was not called upon even to tell his story to the coroner's jury, and my informer surmised that the reason lay in Mr. Jandyce's tendency to seek the sensational and to tell big yarns when under the influence of liquor.

I could afford to pass over nothing that might lead to a possible working theory. Therefore I sent Gaspard to Beverly on Tuesday to interview Jandyce. The man had moved to Milton, twenty miles distant, to which place Gaspard followed. It required all of Gaspard's finesse and a fair-size bank note to induce Jandyce to talk, for, with the cunning of the ignorant, he became immediately suspicious that a stranger who was interested in his story at that late day was trying to involve him in some way.

My emissary obtained the information that the man whom Jandyce brought to Overlook on that twelfth of October was of medium height, in figure not unlike Mr. Somhers and with a mustache, but

Jandyce could not recall of what color. His hat was drawn well over his face and his chin was so buried in his muffler (notwithstanding the season) that Jandyce got little idea of his face. He left the eastbound afternoon train at Beverly and entering Jandyce's carriage gave an order to be driven to Overlook. At the gates of Overlook, which he seemed to know, he stopped the carriage and announced that he would walk the remaining distance. His voice was that of a gentleman and, in the opinion of Jandyce, he was "used to orderin'."

So much for the mysterious visitor to Overlook, about whom I resolved to learn more, if possible, for I believed that he existed outside the fertile imagination of Mr. Jandyce. I admitted, however, that I was at loss how to proceed. But Fortune smiled upon me, and lent a helping hand.

I was driving home from Beverly, where I had been to consult the file of the *Dial* that contained the records of the coroner's inquest following Mr. Somhers' death, when I happened upon Dame Arms plodding along on foot in the direction that I was going. There was no footpath at that point and she turned out of the road to let me pass. The apple bloom in her withered face had turned to a scarlet that was beaded with perspiration, but she smiled cheerfully and her bright eyes took on a look of recognition.

"Let me give you a lift, Mrs. Arms," I said as I pulled up. "We seem to be bound in the same direction."

She accepted gratefully, and climbed into the runabout nimbly, considering her age, laughing and motioning me to sit back when I attempted to assist her.

"Lor'! but hit is 'ot!" she remarked as we drove on.

"How does it happen that you were tramping the road so far from home on such a hot and dusty day?" I asked.

"Well, I druv into town wi' Jim, but when we got there 'e fell in wi' some cronies an' they all went t' Clintonville, which meant all day, and happen all night in town fur me or walk 'ome."

I felt my indignation rising against Mrs. Arms' dutiful son, and I expressed it in words, and pretty forcibly, perhaps.

"Jim do no' mean bad, sir," she said in a conciliatory tone when I had done. "'E only do no' think. 'E ne'er beat me yet, nor Maggie, an' lor'! the ol' man ne'er come near withou' givin' one or the other o' us a whack, hif not worse. An' more, Jim 's a good boy wi' 'is money; we ne'er want fur nothin', Maggie nor me. Ho, no, I canno' complain o' my Jamie, sir."

I saw how useless was indignation against the beloved "Jamie," and I envied a disposition that could make so much of the good in a being and pass over with such charity that which was evil.

My mind traveled back to my call at the Arms cottage, and the reception given me by its lord and master, to Maggie's apprehensive eyes, and to my desire to know whether this family knew more of

Mr. Somhers' death than the world believed them to know.

"Did I mention the other day that I came very near asking you to take me to board?" I inquired, stretching the truth to open the subject.

"Lor', no! Ye ha' no' enough o' Hoverlook already?" with a shrewd glance.

"Oh, I don't mean now. But when I was thinking of taking Overlook Mr. Milbrath suggested that I might be more comfortable with you than with only a man to look after my meals. He thought you were still on the farm, I suppose."

"Well, it's good you decided no' to come, sir, unless ye were to be satisfied with Nannie 'Orsford's cookin', fur Jamie's put 'is foot down on my takin' a boarder now an' again save 'tis Mr. La Cour. Says 'e's got money enough to keep us all, an' 'e'll no' 'ave me putterin' 'round. Lor'! I canno' see as another nor two 'd make much difference — since 'e's 'ere so much anyway."

"Mr. La Cour, you mean?"

"Aye, sir, a crony o' Jim's an' a fine gentleman, too, sir."

"A Winton man? Or Beverly, perhaps?"

"Ho, no; from the city, sir. Ho! Wot 'ave I done!"

The tone was tragic, and involuntarily I drew to a standstill as I looked about at the old woman. Her face had regained its normal color, or was, indeed, a tone whiter than usual, and she was wringing her hands in evident distress.

"Has something happened?" I questioned.

"I shouldno' 'ave spoken about Mr. La Cour, sir, an' I beg you to say nothin' about 'im to no 'un, least of all to Jamie or Maggie. Will ye say ye will no', sir?"

Here was something upon which I had not counted. A mystery! Had it anything to do with Maggie's apprehensive eyes, with Jim's ungallant behavior toward me, with the mystery that I was in Winton to solve?

"You need not feel distressed, Mrs. Arms," I said after a second of rapid thought. "Maggie and Jim shall not know that you have spoken, and as I do not know Mr. La Cour I shall have no occasion to mention his name in town."

"Nor to Master 'Arry?" Mrs. Arms questioned quickly, and added reflectively, "but 'e don' know 'im, so 't would make no 'arm nor no good there."

It seemed best to change the subject from La Cour.

"You knew Mr. Milbrath for a good many years, I suppose?"

"Sin' 'e were a lad, sir. A fine-faced lad 'e were, too. It went 'ard wi' my feelin's, sir, when they made out as 'e 'd killed the hold master."

"Surely you did not believe that he did it?"

"Ho no, sir, not at first — not at all, 'appen. But Jamie says there can be na doo' about it, an' Jamie should know, sir. 'E 'eard wot were said in the courtroom."

She looked at me questioningly at first, and as I said nothing the expression gradually changed to a quizzical look which seemed like the reflection of

another thought. Perhaps she was recalling that she had heard me called a detective. She might have said more, but at that moment we came to the drive that led from the road to the Arms' barn, and Mrs. Arms became insistent that I should drive in and stop for a while in the shade.

"Do, now," she said coaxingly, "an' Maggie shall brew ye a nip o' tea to make ye cool."

So I turned the horse's head into the yard, and as I did so Maggie, who was sitting upon the side steps with another young woman, saw who it was that was coming in. Instantly her light-hearted expression changed to one of anxiety. Her companion noticed the change and looked curiously from Maggie to me and back to Maggie.

"What have I done to make your daughter afraid of me?" I asked Mrs. Arms bluntly when Maggie and her friend had departed to prepare the "nip o' tea."

"Afraid o' ye, sir!" cried Mrs. Arms in surprise, and then looked into space and laughed a little consciously.

"It is na that she's afraid, sir," she said after an instant, "but — well, 'appen I might as well tell ye. She's got it shut in 'er 'ead, sir, that ye're a detective. I tol' ye she were different from any gaerl I ever knew — all narves an' fancies, an' bein' the first to see the master a-lying dead, she took the notion they'd think she ha' killed 'im. Why, she's even afraid o' Mr. La Cour. Same reason's far 's I can make out, an' 'im ere all the time lately."

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I thought of the man to whom Maggie had taken the big hat.

"Was Mr. La Cour here the other day when I was here?" I asked.

"Not when ye were here, but after. Lor'! 'ere comes Maggie with the tea. Not a word about 'im, please, sir!"

CHAPTER XVI

AN ALLY GAINED

I LEFT the Arms cottage that afternoon with my mind in a curious condition of conjecture and question, and from the Overlook stable I went directly to the boathouse and thence upon the water, a troll line trailing from the stern of my boat and my thinking cap well adjusted. I pulled into the channel and permitted the boat to drift as I turned over in my mind and pieced together the bits of evidence that had come to my notice in the past week.

When I thought again of my troll line it was more than an hour later, and a hasty examination showed me that a large fish must have nibbled freely at my bait — so freely, indeed, that he had carried it away, hook and all! But I had tabulated a few facts in my mind, and committed them to my notebook. These are what they were:

1st. A secret in the building of the south wing.

2d. Jim Arms held power over Mr. Somhers before erection of wing; therefore was not discharged with other employees when wing was added.

3d. Same power over Mr. Somhers which kept Arms at Overlook during construction of addition explains Mr. Somhers' legacy to the man.

4th. According to report on coroner's inquest in Beverly *Dial*, James Arms "caught a ride" in a neigh-

bor's wagon into Beverly on the morning preceding the tragedy at Overlook, and from there was seen to board a train for Providence. Not proved where he was at hour of murder, but, according to his oath, he was on a train homeward bound between the hours of five and six o'clock, and, reaching Beverly, he walked home, arriving there about seven o'clock, shortly after the body of Mr. Somhers was found.

5th. Maggie Arms knows, or suspects, who killed Mr. Somhers, but has never confided facts, or fears, to her mother — unless the old dame is a mighty good actress.

6th. Jim Arms harbors "gentleman" of whose existence no one outside the family is supposed to know, and who is, perhaps, the source of the ready money which Jim is reputed to display and boast about.

So much for evidence. Now for query and speculation.

What is the secret of the wing? What reason, indeed, would a man of Mr. Somhers' character have for a secret that could be shared only by his nephew, for whom he was believed to cherish an aversion, and a hired man whose reputation, at best, was shady? Moreover, how could that hired man hold an axe, figuratively speaking, over the head of a man so upright as Peter Somhers? Although a retiring man, his daily life was an open book, and his disagreements with his nephew were the only features of it worthy of criticism.

The "power" must, then, have been held on some ground which Mr. Somhers' pride magnified and which the world would have passed over with little comment.

It was quite within the range of probability that a time came when for some reason Jim Arms was in danger of losing his legacy, his profitable berth at Overlook, or both. Would he hesitate, in such circumstances, to put an end to his employer and thus secure the legacy and, in all probability, prolong his service at Overlook? From what I had seen and heard of the man I could not doubt that he would endeavor to protect his own interests at all hazards.

Granting so much, was it probable that disguised *he* was the man Jandyce brought to Overlook? In build he *might* answer Jandyce's description, I was not sure, but could he possibly assume the voice of "a gentleman" and appear like one "used to orderin'?"

Granting, however, that Jim Arms was Jandyce's fare, how had he gained admission to Overlook without the knowledge of the servants? Did that point explain Maggie's conduct at the time of the crime and her present apprehensiveness? Had she admitted her brother to Overlook, whether recognized by her at the time or not, and to save him had she later sworn falsely that she admitted no one that day and that all doors were locked?

I had not yet fixed La Cour's place, that is, why he was apparently in hiding when in Winton. The thought ran through my mind that he was possibly connected with the Somhers case, but I dismissed it, after a little reflection, as improbable. More likely he was a "gentleman crook" who had, by some chance, fallen across Arms' path, and Arms, true to himself, was compelling him to pay for silence. Of

him I should try to learn more later, as well as of the whereabouts of the workmen who constructed the south wing.

In the meantime I had Horsford to deal with, and as I tied my boat I resolved to act immediately and force his allegiance or his enmity. As soon as I had eaten my solitary supper, therefore, I sent for Horsford and asked him pointedly what it was he feared that I would learn.

"Me? Fear you will learn, sir?" he faltered with an effort at surprise, but I could see in his eyes that he had expected and feared this moment.

"Just so, Horsford."

"Wot could there be, sir? You know my life, sir?"

"I know what you have told me, and I know one thing that you have never mentioned to me — Mrs. Horsford's love for drink. Is there anything else?"

"You know that, sir! You know it! Ah! you 'ave sent fur me to say you will get another man. I 'ave tol' 'er it would come to this, sir." Despair was written on the man's face and sounded in his voice.

"Is there no way to make her straighten up?" I asked.

"Only to keep her sister away, sir. She's as good a wife is Nannie as man could ask fur when she lets speerets alone."

"Is there no way that you can suppress this sister — get her out of the way, I mean?"

Horsford shook his head doubtfully.

"Nannie would no' 'ear to no' lettin' 'er come,

sir. The only way is to get 'er away from these parts. Tom, 'er 'usban', 'as a place waiting in Minnesota, an' I wish to God 'e could get money enough to go to it, sir!"

I pondered for a moment.

"See here, Horsford," I said presently. "I don't wish to let you go if we can get on together. But you must admit you 've not acted very friendly since I came. If you 've got anything against me out with it and I'll see what I can do to make things right."

"There 's nothin' at all, sir, nothin'. 'T was only Nannie's cups as made me fear you, sir," answered Horsford earnestly. "But that bloomin' Frenchie," he added with sudden warmth, "I canno' 'ave 'im lingerin' about!"

I laughed.

"If Gaspard is your worst enemy, don't trouble," I said. "I can promise that henceforth he will transact all his business at the cottage with you. And now about that sister. If I advance the money to get her and her husband to Minnesota, do you think I shall ever see it again?"

"I'll promise you that, sir," Horsford cried eagerly. "Tom's a honest man — an' more, I'll see that it's made good to you in time."

So we arranged that matter to the satisfaction of both of us, it seemed; and, as I dismissed Horsford, who was quite rejuvenated with relief and pleasure at the turn affairs had taken, I remarked casually:

"I called upon your cousin, Mr. Arms, the other day, but he appeared less willing to be friendly than you. Is he afraid of me?"

Instantly Horsford's pleasant expression vanished, and his eyes narrowed threateningly.

"'E's no' t' be minded, sir," he said, as if trying to be just to Arms, "but there! I 'ave been keepin' from you," he added in a sudden burst. "I'll stand by you, sir, now that you've been good to me an' mine, an' Jim Harms, who ne'er did me aught but ill, cousin nor no cousin, may go t' the de'il! I beg your pardon, sir. 'T is so I feel about 'im, 'owever, as them who knows us will tell you, sir."

I could have shouted with joy at that moment, for I knew that I had found an ally in Joseph Horsford and that his acquaintance with his cousin's habits and past would soon be my knowledge, if I played my cards skillfully.

"What is the matter with Mr. Arms?" I asked as unconcernedly as possible.

"'E's a bad lot through an' through, that's all, sir. He tried to get my Nannie away from me first — tellin' 'er 'ow 'e 'ad a stan'-in wi' Mr. Somhers and would be a rich man before long; that was when we first come over, sir, afore Mr. Somhers was killed. Then, when 'e saw 'e could no' get 'er that way 'e brought 'er speerets, which 'e were quick to find were 'er weakness. When I found out that — which were after we come to Hoverlook — I gave 'im a thrashing, 'f he were my kin, sir. I 'ad the best of 'im all 'round, height and weight and muscle, fur all 'e is so broad, an' when I'd done wi' 'im 'e were no' much to see, sir. 'E let Nannie alone after that, but 'e's got no more love in 'is 'art fur me nor I 'ave for 'im."

"Who is the man who stays with Arms?" I asked presently.

Horsford looked puzzled.

"I've no 'eard of a man stayin' wi' 'im since Mr. Coles was there last summer."

Mr. Coles was the detective Milbrath had sent there.

"I was at the cottage for a moment this afternoon. I met Mrs. Arms on the road and gave her a lift in the runabout. She returned the compliment by giving me some tea and fruit biscuits. She seems to be a kindly old soul."

"She is that, sir."

"And the girl would be pretty if her eyes were not so scared."

A quicker man would have perceived before this my purpose in all this talk, but Horsford, I found, was too simple-hearted and perhaps too heavy-witted to detect a double purpose.

"'Appen I do no' understand what you mean by Maggie's eyes being scared," he said.

"Perhaps they only look that way when I'm around. She acts afraid of me, too."

Horsford regarded me with question, but made no comment.

"Do you know why she does?" I asked.

"I think, sir, it must be because she 'as an id-ee in the first, as I did, sir, that you were a detective."

"But what difference should that make to her? She has done nothing to be taken for."

Silence.

"Has she?" I queried.

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"Ho, no, sir! Maggie is a good gaerl. But she's been ne'er the same sin' Mr. Somhers were killed."

"Why?"

"I'm not certain, sir. 'Er mother says it were the start it gave 'er narves, but sometimes ——"

"Yes?"

"Sometimes I think — I 'ope I may trust these things I say to your keepin', sir — I think as Jim is hup again' the law somehow — all the money 'e 'as at times, and the rest — an' 'appen, sir, Maggie's narves be fur 'im."

When I found myself again alone that evening I drew forth my notebook and in shorthand made this addition to my tabulation of the afternoon:

Arms boasted a few months previous to Mr. Somhers' death that he would be a "rich man before long."

Horsford proved Arms to be a scoundrel.

Horsford believes that Maggie may suspect her brother of being "up again" the law somehow.

I fell asleep planning how to secure Horsford's coöperation in my work without revealing my mission to him; and how to get his frankest opinion about the mysterious stranger; the probability of Arms having possessed a secret of Mr. Somhers' life; and the chance that the south wing held a mystery.

I had relinquished the theory that Horsford was in any way connected with the warnings, or would know of them.

CHAPTER XVII

INVOLVING MILBRATH

THE next day I drove from my usual morning visit to the post office directly to the Arms cottage, ostensibly to inquire whether I had dropped a certain letter there, in reality to surprise Mr. La Cour if he chanced to be there; also to see whether Arms would appear any more friendly toward me. It had occurred to me that his especially disagreeable manner on the occasion of my previous call might be due to La Cour's proximity. I came away with a conviction that such was the case. There was no stranger in evidence, and Arms, who was lounging on the side porch, was grudgingly amiable.

"'Appen ye're used t' the ghosts at Hoverlook?" he remarked with a leer.

"I've seen none yet," I answered, regarding him steadily, my mind running to the warnings and to that weird cry. I should have to abandon the notion that this man wrote the warnings. He was cunning, no doubt, but not clever. But did he know of them? He continued to stare at me sideways with an impudent smile.

"So?" he said lazily. "Well, they be there — or *it* be there — for I've seen it with my own eyes,

An' see 'ere, I'll just give ye a friendly tip that it is no' to be laughed at."

"You appear to be laughing now — at the remembrance."

"Aye. 'Appen 't is no' the same to remember 's to see, 's 'appen ye understand."

"Whose ghost is it?"

Arms looked at me intently with a curious lengthening of his under jaw.

"I did no' stop to ask it, nor no more will ye. When ye see it I shall expect to 'ear that Hoverlook is to let again."

"Then you'll expect a long time!" I snapped. "I'm here to remain as long as I please, and no visitation is going to budge me. If it becomes necessary I'll have out the whole state militia to protect me, but stay I will!"

"The de'il ye will!" drawled Arms. "Well, I'm no' trying to make ye quit's I know of, so ye'r blazes is wasted on me. I know ye'r brave 's a lion, of course. I sh'd e'en s'ppose young Lord 'Arry'd be 'ere to 'elp ye keep gay."

He flung this at me with another impudent leer which passed instantly into a curious fixity of glance, and I took it to mean that my purpose in Winton was no secret to him.

"Mr. Milbrath is in Europe," I said with a mental modification of the statement, "or his company would be agreeable."

"Sure it would. Murderers are great fur their jolly ways, I've been tol'. But 'e's in Europe is 'e? Boats go quicker 'n they did when I come hover,

it seems, for I saw Lord 'Arry 'ere last week, nor my name is no' James Harmes. That beard o' his do no' count fur nothin' with *me*."

I felt as if I had received a blow.

"What day?" I asked involuntarily.

"Ho! It's news to ye, is hit? Well, it is kind o' me to tell ye'r lordship, but I will. 'Appen it were the first day ye come 'ere, or the next."

"Where?"

"In a private way as we both used to know an' which I am no' tellin' or ye 'd know as much. See? But 'e did no' see me."

I turned away from Arms and jumped into the runabout, angry, hurt and puzzled, but at the same instant it occurred to me that this might be merely one of Arms' tricks.

I turned and looked at him as I reached for the reins. He was grinning under his week's growth of heavy black beard.

"Good day," I said stiffly, and should have started, had not Dame Arms at that moment appeared at the door.

"Ye 're sure not a-goin' wi'out a taste o' the gooseberry wine!" she exclaimed. "It's extra good this year."

So I tarried while I disposed of the old soul's offering.

I was more upset by Arms' revelation than I liked to admit to myself. While confident that he had not written the warnings himself, I was not so certain that he had not delivered them. Could they be from Milbrath, after all? And was it possible that

some, at least, of Arms' ready money was pay for their delivery? All that Kilbourne had said or intimated flooded back to my memory to poison my mind. I would have parted with a week's salary to have had Harrison Milbrath within reach.

In this pessimistic and uncomfortable state of mind I lunched, and then lounged out to the portico. I was utterly unfitted for successful work, and the cool breeze from the bay whispered of diversion on the dancing waters. I thought of Dolly, and immediately I wondered whether Mr. McClure enjoyed boating. If I asked Dolly to go out with me would I have to include the grandpater?

I found Mr. McClure stretched on a rattan couch on the veranda. Beside him sat Dolly, smoothing his thin locks from his forehead with a touch so tender and an expression so affectionate that gladly would I have taken whatever ailed him to have been the subject of her solicitude. She turned slightly upon my approach and, with a smile, laid her forefinger warningly upon her lips. But Mr. McClure was not sleeping. He opened his eyes and seeing me made an effort, quickly suppressed by Dolly, to rise.

"See to what tyranny I am subjected," he grumbled cheerfully. "My headache has vanished under the influence of magic fingers, but I am not permitted to 'rise to the occasion.'"

"Grandfather has been a very sick man to-day," Dolly informed me gravely. "He is subject to these attacks, but afterward he never will admit that they are anything. You will have to address your con-

versation to me, Mr. Bliss, for I don't mean to let grandfather open his mouth for a word."

"I 'am merely a bird of passage," I answered, "and am not to be persuaded to address conversation to anyone on land for more than five minutes. The waves call me, and I ran over to beg you and Mr. McClure to let me take you rowing."

In Dolly's mind there was not the remotest intention of accepting my invitation. I knew that much at once, although a polite and convincing excuse sprang to her lips. But Mr. McClure changed the day by his prompt expression of pleasure.

"Just the thing!" he cried. "Dolly has not had her usual outing to-day. I will leave her wholly to your care, Mr. Bliss, while I sleep off my recent reminder of mortal frailty. Run along, Dolly."

"Here is evidence of my value as a nurse," declared Dolly playfully. "In three short hours my patient has sufficiently recovered to wish me away!"

She rescued the ubiquitous sunbonnet from oblivion beneath a scattering of papers on the veranda table, and permitted it to dangle by its strings from her hand.

"*Au revoir*, grandfather, dear," she said finally. "Since you are sending me away from you, you must spend every minute in sleep."

She tucked a linen duster about the old man's long and lank figure, and, stooping quickly, imprinted a kiss upon his cheek, her mood changing in an instant to maternal tenderness.

He smiled and patted her sunny hair.

"My little Dolly," he murmured. And did he

add, or was it only in my imagination that I heard: "My poor Dolly!"

"Since it is decreed that I am to be a helpless ladye fair, I might as well bow gracefully to the inevitable," commented Dolly, after lowering herself into the green and red boat before I could reach her side at the pier. And she proceeded to establish herself indolently in the stern. "Please bring out your good cushions, Mr. Bliss. I don't like these excelsior things."

"This establishment is a bachelor's; therefore uncomfortable," I answered. "There are no other cushions, but I'll give you my coat."

"Thanks. But a coat wouldn't suit me at all since I know there are other cushions. Haven't you explored the cupboards in your boathouse?"

"They are locked," I ventured, knowing full well what a young woman of Miss Dolly's stamp would think of such an answer, "and I haven't the key. I will get some from the house. You will please excuse me for a minute."

"But I won't excuse you. There are plenty of cushions in our boathouse."

"Then with your permission I will bring those. Is the door unlocked?"

"Quite likely — but I don't want those cushions. On second thought I don't want any but these, which are far more comfortable than I dreamed."

I marveled at the inconsistencies of the feminine mind.

"Very well," I said as I pounded the maligned cushions into a reclining seat for my lady, "then

we'll make a start if you say so. You'll lose that sunbonnet in the water if you're not careful."

"How dreadful that would be! To avoid such a calamity, I'll put it on." She tied the ends of the strings at her throat and permitted the bonnet to hang on her shoulders in the fashion that was becoming familiar to me.

"You don't know, perhaps, that the reason I wear this absurdity so constantly," she smiled mischievously, "is because my 'complexion' is being preserved for a great event. According to my god-mother I'm to be next winter what old Mr. Hutton calls a 'sas-i-ty' girl. She says" — Dolly's face was very demure — "that I'm cut out for one."

"Really?" I remarked, regarding her with amusement, but with a note, nevertheless, of the resolute small chin. "I fancy you would be rather difficult to 'cut out' into anything you did n't care to be."

"And you think that I don't care for a gay time — such as other girls have?"

The music of her voice changed suddenly with the last words, and the pathos that crept in moved me strangely and set me wondering.

"I think you will enjoy anything that you make up your mind to enjoy, whether it be ballroom or baseball. But if you wish my opinion as to whether it is the life you would most enjoy, I might as well answer at once. No; decidedly no."

A curious expression played across the girl's features.

"Please tell me why," she said.

"For one thing, you are far more serious-minded

than you would have the world believe," I answered, seizing at random from the impressions formed by my first study of the girl.

"Indeed!" mocked Dolly, but she flushed consciously.

"And," I continued, "you are happier when ministering to the comforts of others; a frivolous, butterfly existence would soon weary you past endurance, if it attracts you even now."

Dolly smiled without looking at me.

"It looks as if godmother Foster were doomed to another disappointment," she admitted, "for I believe that you are right. Mrs. Foster is the only one interested in the matter, you see, and when she gets to town her clubs and missions and receptions and whist demand so much attention that I have only to coax grandfather to write a nice letter to her to the effect that another year's work is really needed to make my music worth while, and back comes an answer that avers that by another winter I shall be quite hopeless as a *débutante*, but, it is to be hoped, still presentable; and inasmuch as Mr. Foster and she realize again that America is impossible in winter and will start for Egypt, immediately after the holidays, it is, perhaps, as well, as grandfather suggested, that I apply myself to music for another year." Then the shadows that clouded Dolly's eyes a moment earlier fled before the contagion of her rippling laugh.

"There!" I cried, "I am constrained to say 'didn't I tell you so?'"

Nevertheless it seemed to me curious that a girl

like Dolly, endowed by nature with the qualities that make social success, should find no fascination in the thought of a fashionable life, and I expressed myself to that effect.

Dolly, gracefully lolling in the stern of the boat, colored vividly and adjusted her skirts with elaborate care before she answered.

"Well, you see, I was not trained to care. A life in the country with dear old granddad does not tend to things frivolous. Perhaps I should see things differently if he had not needed me when I left school. Then I felt a wee bit cheated, I'll admit. Now it does n't seem to matter — I must be getting old."

"As old as Methuselah," I agreed banteringly. But the pathos in the girl's last words troubled me. Again her voice was full of unshed tears, and her eyes, as she lifted them to gaze across the water took on an expression of melancholy that I had noticed in the train. Yes, assuredly, her young life had seen trouble, and the wound it had made, while hidden from the world, still stung at times.

"As old as Methuselah," I repeated, "come to earth again! The first time I saw you in Winton I thought that you might be as much as twelve!"

Dimples danced suddenly in Dolly's cheeks.

"When you tumbled into the water you reminded me of my twelve-year-old cousin Nan. But you're not Nan by a mile. From that hour I called you Undine."

"I hope that I have a soul."

"No one would question it — and a heart."

"I don't wear it on my sleeve, I hope?"

"Sometimes it is there. I think Mr. McClure could pluck it off, and I'm certain Prince Charming can when he comes."

Dolly raised her eyes to mine with an expression of such surprise that for an instant I thought I must have hit a truth unwittingly. Then she laughed infectiously.

"Have you ever happened to see it?" she demanded.

"Several times, but it was clear that it had not presented itself for me. It was out undisguised and fearless the first time I saw you — the very first time."

"That first time! When I distinguished myself and was christened 'Undine,' I suppose?"

"When you journeyed from New Haven to Winton last week."

A puzzled wrinkle drew Dolly's straight brows.

"When you were on the same train as I?"

"It was my pleasure, mademoiselle," I answered in elaborate impersonation of Gaspard, "and my sorry fate to be seen and immediately forgotten."

"Dear me! What a pity I did not know. Grandpa could have taken you up in the phaeton when he met me. I dare say you had to go up with 'Hank' Hutton?"

"Hank Hutton it was."

"And Hank's so afraid of Overlook after dark, too!"

"Doubtless he shares the common superstition concerning the place. It doesn't seem possible,

however, that such preposterous notions can last. See how lovely it looks now with the shadows on it."

We were well across the bay by this time, and from our point of view the neck of land on which Winton lay appeared uninhabited, save by giant trees and a church spire which were etched upon a cloud-fleeced sky; but back on the bluff rose Overlook, gray and quiet in her lovely grounds — too beautiful, by far, to be shrouded in a veil of mystery.

Dolly looked, as I bade, but reluctantly, and the expression, which changed her to a serious woman, again deepened in her eyes.

"You know that the villagers call it the 'Place of Silence'?" she remarked.

"I have heard it referred to by that name. Suggestive, is it not, but rough on the place? The fact that it is now occupied may help to dislodge some of the moss of superstition (to be fanciful) that has been flourishing on it; and when the perpetrator of that atrocious crime is finally landed it ought to recover its former prestige."

CHAPTER XVIII

DOLLY REVEALS A SECRET

I HAD not hoped to stir Dolly to a confidence. It had not, indeed, occurred to me that the matter which had brought me to Winton would have for her any greater interest than would the mysterious death of any respected neighbor. My words were idle, save, perhaps, for the hope of pleasing her, for the more sensible Wintonites could but deplore the unhappy repute into which their choicest estate had fallen.

To my surprise, however, Dolly leaned forward and looked directly into my eyes with a grave, unwavering glance.

"I would give everything I have in the world, Mr. Bliss, to know who killed Mr. Somhers," she said with a quiet vehemence that startled me. "*You* know that it was not Harry Milbrath?"

I thought of Jim Arms' insinuations, of my doubts and suspicions of the morning. But, after all, I had not, even then, believed for a moment that Milbrath was the man I sought.

"Yes," I agreed. "Whoever did it I believe that it was not Harry Milbrath."

"Or done with his knowledge," persisted Dolly.

"Or done with his knowledge."

Dolly's eyes suddenly glistened with the moisture of unshed tears, and, in spite of a brave effort to smile, she had to turn away for a moment.

When she spoke again there was a note of confiding appeal in her voice.

"Mr. Bliss," she said, "has it occurred to you that the criminal's motive was to injure Harry?"

"Yes," I answered, realizing that she must know why I was in Winton, "that possibility has been one of my theories, but I can find no motive strong enough. Mr. Milbrath seems to have had no enemies up to the time of the tragedy."

"Then you do not know of Jim Arms?"

The start I gave rocked the boat.

"I do know Arms. That is, I've spoken with him twice, but I have found no evidence that he was Mr. Milbrath's enemy."

"He was," said Dolly with conviction, and her cheeks became very pink, "and he is. At the coroner's inquest he swore to the most damaging evidence, and there was only a little of it — such a very little of it — true. You know what Tennyson says about a lie that is all a lie; it can be met and fought with outright. 'But a lie that is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.' That was the case with the testimony of Jim Arms; only the truthful part was so exceedingly small. Now that he has convicted Harry to a living death he is not content. He dares to sneer at him and to say that he sees him sneaking around here at times."

"And in that he lies?" I asked eagerly.

Dolly did not look at me. Her eyes were upon

her wet hand magnified in the water. And she did not answer.

"It is a lie?" I asked again, and felt my heart chilling.

"It is not all the truth. Harry never was or could be a sneak. But yes; he has been in Winton and at Red Gables between trains a few times this summer. He thought himself unrecognized. Oh, Mr. Bliss, I should not have told you this! It cannot help you, and — Grandfather knows, of course, but the village must not, *must not*. I hope you understand?"

I thought that I understood. At that moment there was no question in my mind as to the story those scarlet cheeks and lowered eyelids, and sweet, tremulous lips betrayed. I only wondered that I had not thought of it before; the most natural story in the world: a boy and girl love that had not died with the passing of time, with trouble, or with disgrace that had come to one of them. And suddenly I knew whose boyish face it was in the little heart-shaped locket that I had found, and which was Dolly's constant companion.

That moment also brought to me another revelation — a glimpse of my own heart, and a recognition of the thrust that it had just received.

The oars swung in their locks beneath my yielding hands, and, with the falling tide, the boat drifted into the channel. My fingers felt suddenly parched and I trailed them in the water. Just before me was Dolly's hand, slender, pink, exquisite. I longed to seize it in my own and pour out to her the words

of passion that came from my heart and were stifling me. But the shades of my Scotch ancestors restrained me from that midsummer madness; and, presently, I found that the hot blood had gone from my head, the sharp pain from my heart. After all, since I could not claim the prize, why should I not rejoice that it had gone to one so needy at that time and, doubtless, so worthy as Harrison Milbrath?

My thoughts passed from personalities to the broader matters that I had in hand. I wanted to ask when it was that Milbrath had been in Winton; the thought of those warnings haunted me. But I could not bring myself to put a question that would perhaps involve an explanation. Instead I said:

"Would Jim Arms' feeling against Mr. Milbrath carry him to such a length as to kill his own benefactor?"

Dolly nodded emphatically.

"He knew about the legacy, you see. He boasted about it in town. Five thousand dollars at one time seemed like such a lot of money to him. Besides, he was in danger of losing his place and quite likely the legacy, you know."

"Ah! I did *not* know."

"Did n't Harry tell you — of what happened a few days before the murder, I mean?"

"I don't recall that he did," I said.

Dolly looked disturbed and unhappy.

"Then I cannot," she said briefly. "Oh! Why will Harry stand in his own light so persistently!

Write and tell him what I have said and ask him to tell you all."

"If he will not, for his sake I think that you should."

"How can I since he has asked me to say nothing about it? If he will not — as you should know — perhaps grandfather will. But please write to Harry."

"I will, to-night. But now tell me what set Arms against Mr. Milbrath?"

Dolly pondered the matter for a moment.

"The beginning, I suppose, was when he took Harry to a saloon in Clintonville and practically forced him to drink. For days and days Harry was sick after that and, in the end, told his uncle all about it. Jim never forgave him for 'squealing,' as he called it, for he nearly lost his place then, and from that time on he tried in various underhanded ways to injure Harry. But the climax came when Harry detected — Oh, that is the thing I cannot tell you! But this much I can say: at that time Jim swore that he would get 'even' with Harry if it cost him his life. And he has a vindictive disposition, you know."

"Do you really believe that was more than an idle threat in a moment of anger? Surely Mr. Milbrath would not keep from me any facts that he considered important."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dolly wisely. "You little know Harry if you do not understand that he will put no one under suspicion without good reason, and his definition of 'good reason' and mine differ.

He has suffered so much himself and is so noble, he gives everyone the benefit of the doubt — if there is one. Nevertheless, I know for a fact that in his mind he does not believe in the complete innocence of Jim Arms.”

“ Was there no one to give this evidence at which you hint at the inquest ? ”

“ There were few who understood how Jim felt toward Harry, and no one, then, besides myself who knew of his threats. I could have testified, of course, but Harry would not consent to bring me into the case ” — her voice shook a little — “ even to — save him. After he was held by the coroner, even, he would let me say nothing, for he felt that the charge was too preposterous to hurt him.”

“ And after the first trial ? ”

“ Then he knew that he could still prove an alibi, but his spirit was broken, and he felt that unless he could find the really guilty one nothing would avail. Oh, Mr. Bliss ! Sometimes it maddens me to think that if at the very first I had resisted Harry’s arguments and had told all that I could have told, a cloud of suspicion would not be hanging over him to-day. Now the days and months and years are passing and we seem just as far as ever from finding who is to blame, who is responsible for these blighted years and heartaches ! ”

The intensity of this unexpected outburst shook my heartstrings. How I wished in that moment that the interest that Dolly had awakened in me were of the kind that Plato advocated, or that I had the right — of a brother, even — to comfort her !

The feeling of irritation and suspicion against Milbrath which had grown on me during the morning was augmented by Dolly's admission of his visits to Winton; and her assertion of evidence against Arms, which he had failed to tell me, roused the belief that he had done so intentionally and encouraged the hateful conclusion that he was not dealing openly with me. All these emotions were, however, swept away for the moment by Dolly's tragic accents. My one thought became a wish to encourage and help her.

"You know why I am at Overlook?" I asked.

Dolly raised her eyes and looked at me through glistening lashes.

"Yes," she answered simply.

"Then let me say that although the incentive seemed sufficient before, my resolve to detect Mr. Somhers' slayer has received fresh stimulus this afternoon, and if wisdom is given me to succeed, Harrison Milbrath shall soon be wholly vindicated."

Dolly's lips moved as if to speak, but though no words came, remembrance of the smile that gladdened her face at that moment lent me courage to go on in many a disheartening hour in the days that followed.

I turned the boat toward home. The sun was well behind the tree-tops on the bluff when we neared the Overlook pier. Dolly had been very quiet since her pathetic outburst of a half hour earlier, and now she sat in the stern graceful, dignified, lady-like, waiting for me to bring the boat alongside and help her ashore.

As I reached for the line that moored the boat I heard a door close softly, and, looking in the direction of the sound, I perceived a man disappearing in the shrubbery at the foot of the bluff. Inquiringly I turned to Dolly, and observed that the color had left her face. Her eyes were fixed in the direction taken by the man with a sort of fascinated anxiety.

"Do you know who it was?" I asked.

She shook her head, but not convincingly.

"Then if you will excuse me for a moment I will follow him. I wish to know the name of every stranger who comes upon these grounds while I am here."

I sprang upon the pier, and extended a hand to Dolly. But she did not move.

"It will do no good to follow," she said wearily. "Whoever it is, he will have no difficulty in all that brush of evading you, if that is his desire."

"Very likely you are right; but I will *try* to get him."

Dolly rose languidly, but she did not accept my assistance.

"Go, then," she said. "I will wait here."

As Dolly predicted, the man had disappeared, and I felt that I had no right to go beyond earshot of the girl upon the pier. So I returned, feeling both chagrined and annoyed — a bit with her, perhaps. Who was this stranger whose coming brought that expression into Dolly's eyes? I had not seen his face, but he was tall, heavily built, young and,

I judged from his movements, athletic. By Jove! He was like Harrison Milbrath!

"He was Mr. Milbrath's style," I remarked, my eyes on Dolly.

She flushed.

"I thought so, too," she admitted, "but Harry sailed for Europe to-day, did he not?"

"He was to have done so, but if he did not what is his purpose in coming here and in scampering away like a criminal when he is seen?"

Dolly made no response, and I saw that even her lips were white. I anathematized myself mentally for a brute, but I could find no words to mellow the thought I had expressed.

Slowly and in silence we followed the gravel path that climbed the bank. At the gate to Red Gables Dolly paused.

"It was good of you to take me out," she said smilingly, and I noticed that her face had recovered its usual equanimity, "but I shall not ask you to come in now. It is better for grandfather to be alone after such an attack as he had this morning. Come to-morrow," and she extended her hand as she spoke.

Even as I said my adieux I formulated a plan for action, and once out of sight of the girl I had left I almost ran to the house.

"Gaspard," I cried, "put a saddle on the mare and be ready in five minutes to ride into town for me. Never mind dinner; that can wait. Hurry, now!"

And hurry he did, for within the time I gave

him he cantered up to the portico entrance and I handed him two telegrams with instructions to wait at the station until answers arrived.

Then I seated myself upon the portico and scanned as much of the grounds as were visible in the hope of catching another glimpse of the man who had evaded me. Horsford, driving the cows in, was, however, the only human being I saw.

Just as the sinking sun set ablaze the window panes in Beverly, across the bay, Gaspard returned with two messages. One was from the manager of the Oriental Hotel at Manhattan Beach, whom I knew personally, and stated that Milbrath had left his house on the previous day, destination unknown; the other, signed by the Cunard Steamship Company, was as follows:

"Mr. H. Milbrath on the 21st cancelled his booking for passage on the 'Umbria.'"

CHAPTER XIX

WARNED AGAIN

THE effect of these messages was, to say the least, disquieting. I could not put aside Kilbourne's insinuation that Milbrath, while guiltless of the crime against his uncle, might have a reason for wishing me to leave Overlook, and by anonymous warnings was endeavoring to drive me away. On the other hand, Kilbourne had also said that when I found the one who uttered that weird cry I should find the author of the communications, and, probably, the slayer of Peter Somhers. These two remarks were inconsistent in appearance, but I took it that the latter was a modification of the former, which, at the time, I had regarded as of little value. Now, however, it assumed a new importance, and the notion that Milbrath's reason for wanting me to leave had its origin in the secret of the south wing recurred to me insistently.

My sleep was restless and unsatisfactory that night. I dreamed of Milbrath in a half dozen ways, but the only tangible recollection of my dreams was the expression of his face. It haunted me for hours, and it was with a heavy heart that I started out after breakfast to learn something, if possible, as to the whereabouts of the men who had built the wing.

From the "faculty" I learned nothing, and had no reward for two hours spent in lounging and gossiping.

Hutton was of a little more assistance, but the help he offered was so meager that the hour I spent with him seemed little better than wasted. Hutton knew that one of the men bore the name of Johnson, and that was all that he did know about the four men who had put up the wing, except that all of them came from "Boston way." With that information I had to be content for the time being.

A train for Boston left Beverly at five o'clock. I resolved to go up at that time and try my skill at getting at *the* Johnson. With this idea in mind I returned to Overlook just in time for lunch.

As I seated myself at the table I observed an envelope lying face downward among the forks and spoons that Gaspard set punctiliously before my place. I turned it over and found thereon one word — "Bliss" — printed with a pen in finely shaded old English letters. It was unsealed and inside was a piece of ruled paper which appeared to have been cut from a sheet of foolscap such as I had received on two previous occasions. In the center of this neatly cut slip were pasted two printed clippings:

"And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself.

"My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.

"Have pity upon me! Have pity upon me!"

Underneath was penned in small, old English print: "Job, xix, 4, 20, 21."

At that moment Gaspard entered the room with the soup.

"Gaspard," I said, "who brought this note that you put at my place?"

Gaspard stared at me in amazement.

"Zee note, m'sieu?" he queried. "I put no note anywhere."

"Look at this envelope," I said. "Don't you remember that?"

"I do not, m'sieu. I haf nefer before seen eet."

"Has anyone been to the house this morning?"

"Not von parson, m'sieu."

"Then, Gaspard, some one has crept in and left this here — right here at my place."

"Impos-e-ble, m'sieu," declared Gaspard thoughtfully. "Zee screen doors zay fas'ened vare, even mine in zee cuisine. Does m'sieu recollect zat he must vait on zee portico till I come to his ring?"

That was true. It appeared that whoever left the note was now in the house. I told Gaspard so much and directed him to make sure whether there were any door or window open or unfastened by which an intruder could have entered and escaped.

Before I had done with the soup Gaspard was back to report that everything was secure on the ground floor. It seemed farcical to search the house, but it was the only way that I could satisfy myself that the intruder was not within earshot. Leaving Gaspard, therefore, still on guard in the hall, I went through each room.

There was no one on the ground floor, and in the second story only those rooms used as sleeping rooms were unlocked. I carried on my key ring the keys to the others. The three chambers were without tenant save myself, and the attic and cellar doors not only were locked but were bolted on the side next to me. On the whole I was satisfied that whoever put the envelope at my place had got away again; the only question was *how*? An agile person might have climbed a portico column and entered by a second floor window, but it was exceedingly improbable and I abandoned the idea as soon as I found that the dust on the window ledge which had been protected from the rain, showed no traces of recent disturbance.

But two logical deductions seemed to remain:

1st. That Gaspard was mistaken as to all first floor doors and screens being locked during the forenoon; 2d. That a secret door existed.

The latter might, indeed, be the explanation of the mystery that surrounded the building of the wing. But to where would it lead? Obviously to the cellar only, unless — my mind flew to the tiny passage between the parlors and the library. I had never crossed it without feeling curious as to why Mr. Somhers designed it.

I dismissed Gaspard from guard with instructions to be on the lookout for a stranger on the premises, and began an examination of the wall space in the entry which was paneled and might, therefore, easily secrete a door. But it yielded no false note to the tapping which I gave it and I entered the library to

see whether I could gain anything from an investigation from that side.

As I have said elsewhere, the walls of the library were lined with built-in bookcases. Those on the north wall directly to the right of the door I hoped to find movable, but it required the displacing of only one row of books for me to see the wall behind, and the way the shelves were cleated into it convinced me that no door existed there.

I did not, however, feel satisfied, and should not until I could account for the four feet of space which extended east (and back) of the entry between the library and the parlors. Of course it might be simply a hollow, walled-in space left thus for the purpose of breaking sound between the main house and the library.

As I returned the books to their places, Gaspard came to announce that Horsford was without with the mower, and would be glad to have me give him directions as to trimming the edges of the walks. As it was upon my instruction that Horsford undertook the work that particular day, I could not consistently refuse to go out to him. I went, therefore, regretfully, and so much of my advice did Horsford seem to require that the village clock struck six as I turned again to the house.

Just as I reached the portico, the sullen-faced grandson of Hutton drove up. He brought a telegram from Kilbourne dated from Hartford at four o'clock that afternoon announcing that he would arrive in Winton at seven-thirty.

Young Hutton was as uncommunicative and ap-

parently as glad to get away from Overlook as he had been on the evening of my arrival, and he left the grounds by the rear drive at a brisk pace. I watched him until he disappeared, with feelings of amusement and contempt. Once on these grounds had been his home. Here he had played, slept, eaten, and worked. Now, with a lively consciousness that no lovelier spot existed in Winton, he dreaded to approach it, in fear of the shadow which rumor had given this place of silence.

As I went back to the house my mind returned to Kilbourne's message. If I had not, long before, ceased to be surprised by anything Kilbourne did I should have marveled a little that he should return so unexpectedly. Doubtless the inspiration interrupted by his trip to Winton had failed to return or had been "worked off," and the heat and noise of the city had suddenly become intolerable to him. Then, too, he might retain the pleasant memory of Dolly's smile and varying moods. If that were, indeed, the attraction I pitied him, for no longer had I the slightest doubt that Dolly's heart was already preëmpted. But I shook my head at the thought that Dolly was the magnet drawing Kilbourne back to Winton. Too often had I witnessed the antics of his fickle heart to give Dolly credit for holding it for five consecutive days.

It was just before seven-thirty when I reached the Winton station, but the New York train was late and there was nothing to do but to possess myself with patience until its arrival. Hutton was in his cubby-hole inside the bow window and seemed to be

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doing a thriving business for Winton in the ticket and telegraph trade, so I made myself comfortable on the bench.

The sun had set and the sky was a deep, dull red above the lonely stretches of marshland which I faced. The frogs and crickets vied with one another in the amount of monotonous noise they could yield, and above that came the occasional roar of the surf as it beat on the stony beach at the foot of the marshlands. I was glad when Hutton lounged to the window.

"This has been what you might call workin'," he observed affably, "'taint of'en we do a rush business like this."

"What's the cause to-day?"

"Oh, the Methodis' folks up at Clintonville had a picnic to Beverly, and they had to come and go by Winton. You expectin' somebody?"

"Yes; the man who went away on Monday. Your boy brought me a message."

"Oh!" Then after a pause: "I never could see why folks comin' from N' Yo'k or goin' there sh'd ever go by Winton when the line that goes through Beverly's so much faster and no change."

"Well, I dare say the hour of starting has something to do with it."

Hutton stared at the marshlands abstractedly; then he began to chuckle.

"There's the queerest old chap comes for this train sometimes. He's more'n my age, I sh'd say, and I'm past sixty. I can't think where he comes from, for nobody over village way knows him or

has seen him so far 's I've found out, an' usually he pops right up on the platform here as 'f he come up through the b'ds. I s'ppose he gets around the deepot quiet-like before I see him. But this time he come at noon — this noon just as the train was movin' out. Gosh! if that old feller did n't run and grab onto the tail end of the train and jerk himself up! First I was scared, an' then I laffed an' laffed so I could sca'cely lock up an' go home. You wait till he comes aroun' again. I guess I'll have some fun with *him!* ”

“ Pretty spry for an old man? ”

“ You bet! I'd kinder like to know who he is and where he comes from. He's no farmer nor country man. Yet them two trains, the noon one and this a-comin' in don't touch anywhere but villages after Hartford.”

“ Does n't it connect with a Boston train at Lewis Junction — this train, I mean? ”

“ W-all, yes, and that's where he says he goes. I asked him once. He acted kinder mad. ‘ Boston,’ says he sharp as a knife, an' I dassen't say any more then. But I did n't b'lieve him. Nobody that can get to Beverly comes here to take a Boston train. Some time I'll ask the conductor — if I ever get a chance. You see, the old chap never bought a ticket o' me.”

“ What does he look like, this old man? ” I asked.

“ W-all, he's a little more hunched in the shoulders than I be, but he's about the same height, and his whiskers all over his face is gray.”

A vision of a man coming toward me from the chief's room as I sat at my desk in the reporters' corner suddenly floated before my eyes.

"Has he blue eyes, very light blue eyes?" I asked involuntarily, "and a florid skin?"

Hutton regarded me with surprise. "W-all, I sh'd say likely," he answered, "though I can't say I ever paid much attention to them points. His pepperyness is what struck me hardest. You know him?"

"I suppose not, for the man that I have in mind would have no reason to come to Winton. Ah, there's our train," as a distant locomotive shriek broke upon the air. At the same instant the telegraph instrument began to click, and the party of picnickers gathered together their boxes and bags.

As I went down the platform to meet Kilbourne my mind was in a whirl with the new suggestions that rushed in upon it, but above all vibrated the thought that Philander Summerfield had been in Winton that morning. And why?

CHAPTER XX

A RESIGNATION AND A REFUSAL

KILBOURNE made no attempt to disguise the reason for his unexpected return to Winton. Indeed, before we reached Overlook he frankly declared that since Monday he had thought of no one and of nothing but Dolly McClure. He manifested little interest in my affairs, and coolly intimated that he had come to make me a visit of indefinite length.

I was both nettled and hurt by his indifference, and his candor was the only thing that saved the day for him. I never could quarrel with a man who was absolutely frank. So I pocketed my wrath, made no comment about the matters uppermost in my mind, and, as patiently as possible, awaited the turn of the tide in his *affaire de cœur*.

When, however, Monday arrived without any visible change, I openly rebelled against being towed to Red Gables twice daily to sit on the veranda and talk idly with Mr. McClure, or join him in a game of chess, while Kilbourne entertained the oftentimes obviously reluctant Dolly. As we smoked our after-dinner cigars upon the portico on Monday evening, therefore, I mentioned casually that business connected with the case would take me to Boston on the following day.

Kilbourne regarded me with absent eyes.

"Oh," he said presently, "the case. Yes. That's all right, Bliss. You need n't apologize. You know that it is not your attractive personality that is holding me now. I'll indulge myself in that later — when you are back in town with your — what was it? sixty thousand dollars! By the way, how is the case coming on?"

"As well as can be expected," I made reply stiffly, and in the language of a medical man discussing a disease.

"Oh!" commented Kilbourne again, this time, however, with a sharp, comprehensive glance at me. "I see." He flung away the end of his cigar and rose.

"Come," he said. "Let us meander into the suburbs," indicating Red Gables with his thumb.

"Not for me, thank you. I think I'll have a row on the bay a little later. There's a clear moon."

"Yes; I had observed. I was wondering a moment ago how Miss Dolly would enjoy an hour on the water," and Kilbourne sauntered away.

I watched him as he moved slowly across the lawn, and marveled that such a combination of acumen and dense egotism could exist in any one man. Had he been for five minutes only in the company of a couple like Dolly McClure and himself he would have known that Dolly's interest in him was merely that of a friend, and he would have regarded his own confidence and high spirits as little short of idiotic blindness. Nothing that I said to give him a hint of what I believed to be the girl's true condition of heart made the slightest

impression on him, and he intimated gayly that I was merely green with envy. The name of Milbrath was not mentioned between us, and I believe that at the time Kilbourne's mind never associated Milbrath with Dolly.

As I started for the boathouse Gaspard came up with the evening mail. One letter, addressed in a small, cramped hand, was postmarked "Boston," and I knew from whom it came before I opened it.

I had done some hard thinking since Friday evening, piecing out another theory for my case; or rather another part to the one already on the carpet. If this stranger to Winton to whom Hutton referred were indeed Philander Summerfield he, too, was involved in the mystery, notwithstanding the fact that he had engaged me to try to solve it.

On Saturday I found an excuse to see Hutton again.

"Have you seen your old man since Thursday?" I inquired.

"Nope. Oh, he'll not be around this way for a week or more, likely. Gosh! I bet he got a crick in his back from pullin' himself onto that train! You sure you don't know him?"

"How could I? The man his description fits I never saw outside New York. When was it you first saw him?"

"Oh, some time ago — June, I guess."

"That was long before I thought of coming here. I dare say he has friends in Winton. Did no one ever come to the station with him?"

"Nope."

"And he looks like no one you ever saw?"

Hutton shook his head.

"There ain't nobody in this part of the country like him, though I'll be switched if I can tell what makes the difference. 'T ain't his voice nor way of speakin', for the fust time he said a word — Gosh! if I did n't get a start! Sounded for all the world like old man Somhers. Did n't know Mr. Somhers, did you?"

"I knew him when I was a little chap," and I told Hutton a little about that early acquaintance. "But I cannot recall his voice," I concluded, wishing with all my heart that I could.

"W-all, I can't say myself exactly how 't was — kinder quick and nervous-like anyway."

And that was all that I gained from Hutton that day. But it evolved a train of thought that found expression in the following letter, which I mailed that very noon:

MR. PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD,

DEAR SIR: My investigations have led me to a point where I can no longer act honestly in your interest and be justified in accepting a salary from you.

I shall continue, however, to probe the Somhers mystery on my own responsibility, with the hope of obtaining ultimately the reward offered by Mr. Milbrath for the detection of his uncle's assassin.

I beg, therefore, that you release me from the agreement into which I entered with you on August 16th.

Very truly,

ELMER BLISS.

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The letter which Gaspard handed me was characteristic, it seemed to me, of the eccentric writer. It ran:

MR. ELMER BLISS,

MY DEAR YOUNG MAN: Don't be idiotic and throw away a good chance to make a fortune. I don't care a continental if you make two of them. So continue to work in the interest of that young scamp Milbrath, if you see fit, as well as in mine.

By the way, did you intimate that you think you have a clue?

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

What was Mr. Summerfield's purpose in ignoring entirely my insinuation that I believed him involved in the case? Being innocent did he really overlook what I intended to imply and regard my desire to be released from my agreement with him merely because the offer made by Milbrath appeared more attractive? Or, being guilty, did he hope to blind me by an assumption of innocence?

In either case I was resolved to free myself from him and be able to work irrespective of the consideration that he was my employer. If he proved to be in nowise involved in the crime or connected with my anonymous communications, and wished to reward me in case of my success, I should be willing to have that understanding; and I returned to the house and at once wrote a letter to that effect to Mr. Philander Summerfield. I did not, in so many words, tell him that I connected him with the case, but I explained that conditions appeared to exist

that made it undesirable for me longer to accept a weekly salary from him, and said that I wished to work independently without obligation to him.

This letter I put in my pocket to mail on the morrow. Then I continued my way to the beach.

By this time all the light of the day had faded, and the moon, almost full and riding well up in a cloudless sky, illumined the earth with undimmed brightness. I could see every tree and piece of statuary on the lawn as clearly as in the daylight.

Suddenly the figure of a man passed between me and the bright expanse of water below. It paused, and then came slowly toward me. The next instant Harrison Milbrath and I stood face to face.

CHAPTER XXI

MILBRATH'S ADMISSION

THERE was silence for the space of a breath. Then Milbrath spoke.

"Do you wonder what I am doing here?" he asked.

"You were to go abroad," I faltered.

"That was my intention, but there is no place like America, after all, Mr. Bliss, and no friends ——"

"Like old friends," I finished for him involuntarily. Milbrath strode a step nearer to me, which brought him into the full light of the moon, and putting both hands upon my shoulders, he looked at me searchingly.

"You know?" he queried.

"I have surmised," I corrected.

Milbrath's arms dropped to his sides, and when he spoke again, after a second, it was on a different subject.

"I have to ask your pardon for slipping away from you as I did last Thursday," he said. "My conduct on that day was unjustified, though at the time I believed it to be right. I may be able to explain the reason for it very soon, but until then I hope that my admission that I was at Overlook and wished to leave it without your knowledge that I had been here will be sufficient to restore your confidence in me."

"I do not forget, Mr. Milbrath, that I am your tenant only by courtesy, and that I have no right to question the reason for any visit you may choose to make to Overlook, or the way that you make it. But, on the other hand, I am trying to work in your interest on a case that is peculiarly baffling and if I am to succeed I must have every assistance that you can give me, whether or not it brings to my knowledge facts that you and Mr. Somhers would have preferred to remain unrevealed."

Milbrath regarded me for a moment in mystified silence.

"It sounds momentous," he said presently, "but you will pardon me if I confess that I do not get its meaning."

I laughed at his whimsical gravity.

"But, in point of fact, the matter is not one to be laughed at," I said. "My residence here has brought me face to face with a peculiar condition of affairs in which, I believe, lies the solution of Mr. Somhers' death. There are some points on which you, perhaps, can shed light. Are you willing to go on the rack for a few minutes and let me make you acquainted with the conditions by questions?"

"Certainly."

"In the first place, then, whom did you endeavor to shield that evening we arranged for me to come here when I asked whether you ever suspected anyone of killing or of knowing who killed your uncle?"

"I shielded no one. My hesitation at that moment was unfortunate."

"But there is some one whom once you suspected?"

"Yes; but I have been proved wrong."

"Mr. Milbrath, I must know. Whom did you suspect?"

"Jim Arms."

"Ah! Will you tell me why?"

"May I have your assurance of secrecy? I have as I have said, proved him innocent of any connection with the crime, and though he is a worthless dog, as you have doubtless found, I will not have his name entangled now."

"You can depend upon my discretion."

"It was in this way — a somewhat involved tale. Two nights before uncle's murder Jim attempted to rob Overlook. He had contracted some gambling debts in Clintonville and thought, I suppose, to rid himself of them by disposing of some of uncle's available property. I surprised him in the dining room ready to get off with a basket full of silver plate. He would have killed me then with pleasure, but I reminded him that shots would rouse the household and that his chances for freedom would be slim after that. He was never one to face danger; so he took my counsel, as I knew that he would. Nevertheless he swore roundly that if ever I breathed a word of the facts he'd get even with me if it cost him his life. I paid no heed to his words, of course, and the next day told uncle the whole story."

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"How did Mr. Somhers take the information?" I asked, thinking of the influence I believed Arms to have had over the old man.

"Coolly, to my surprise. 'He's a rascal. I know that already,' was his only comment. I felt indignant at uncle's attitude, naturally, but if he cared so little for his valuables as to retain the man who would rob him of them it was none of my business, now was it?"

"Scarcely."

"But I wondered then as I had wondered before and have wondered since, why in the deuce uncle excused everything that cur did and kept him on the place."

"Had you any reason to think that Jim feared he would lose the legacy?"

"Yes. The evening before the tragedy I was returning home from Red Gables, and as I approached the house I saw Jim standing before uncle in the library. Uncle was prancing about, apparently in high temper, and one of the windows being open I distinctly heard him exclaim: 'That's enough! That's enough! Not a penny of my money will you ever get. You've tried me past endurance. Go!' Whether the command referred to his presence in the room or to his discharge from Overlook I had no way of knowing, but I took it to mean the latter."

"Naturally. This is all news to me, but it strengthens the circumstantial evidence that I have gathered against the man."

"Discard it as worthless. It will only lead you

astray. You see, I have gone into the matter pretty thoroughly myself. In New York I alluded to another investigation. You see, I clung to my theory. Jim's attitude toward me and Maggie's conduct and manner of testimony strengthened it. So, when I was finally free, I engaged Coles, the famous detective, to pass himself off as a business man on a vacation and get board with Arms. He lived there for a month and came to know the family intimately. He learned most of Jim's sins, but he came away convinced that while Arms professed to believe that I killed my uncle he did not really believe it and was as much puzzled as anyone."

"Did you ever hear of a man named La Cour?" I asked.

Milbrath shook his head.

"Some blackguard acquaintance on whom Jim is levying blackmail, no doubt," he said, when I had told him what I knew of La Cour. "By the way," he added, "it must seem queer to you that I did n't appear to know that Arms was no longer at Overlook. I did know it once, but had forgotten it. This property, you see, has been in the hands of an agent and I've given it scarcely a thought. I must apologize for my stupidity."

"It is not worth mentioning. I am glad that Arms is not here. But there are some strictly personal matters I should like to ask you about."

Milbrath looked surprised.

"Ask me anything you like," he said.

"Then I'll go to the point at once. Where were you the day that I came to Winton?"

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"That was the day after our talk at the Reform Club? Let me see. Why, at Manhattan Beach. I must have been there, for I returned there directly upon leaving you and remained there until last Monday."

"I received a letter from you postmarked 'Station F'?"

"I sent it in by an acquaintance."

"Arms asserts that he saw you here about that time."

"Then Arms is either mistaken or lies. I was here two days before I saw you, and again last Thursday."

"Have you any knowledge of the authorship of this note, or how it came to me?" and I handed him the first warning.

He read it with an expression of growing amazement and incredulity.

"Do you mean to say that was sent to you?" he asked.

I explained the circumstances of its receipt.

"I give you my word that I know nothing of it. Why, I did not know, even, that you live on Forty-sixth Street."

"So I believed. Do you know, then, who put this upon your uncle's library table the morning after my arrival in Winton; how this found its way to my suitcase the afternoon of the same day; or how this came to be at my place upon the lunch table last Friday noon?" And I laid the collection of anonymous notes before Milbrath.

He read them through rapidly, one after an-

other by the light of some burning matches that I held for him. He went through them a second time before he spoke.

"You fancied that I might have left them?" he asked presently.

"Never until Thursday, when I believed it was you who slipped away at sight of me."

Milbrath winced.

"Yes; I know that my conduct had a suspicious look. But I know nothing of these. What reason could you assign to me for sending you such — tommyrot?"

"I thought it possible that you were in possession of the secret of the south wing, which you recalled after giving me permission to come here, and of which you wished me to remain in ignorance," I said.

"The secret of the south wing!" he cried. "The south wing of Overlook? What do you mean?"

I recapitulated shortly the facts and conjectures that have already been recorded.

"You deduce, then, that there is a secret door by which the assassin of Uncle Peter made his escape, or behind which he hid until he could leave the house in safety? That this door and hidden room are connected with these astonishing communications?"

"That is my belief."

Milbrath meditated, and then shook his head.

"You are aware of no secret in his life, no irregularity which would make it desirable for him

to have a place of concealment for, perhaps, papers or documents?"

"So far as I know or have reason to believe Uncle Peter was absolutely upright and honorable. I think that his life was clean, and, aside from his outbursts of passion with me, very placid."

"Were not those outbursts toward you — erratic?"

Milbrath smiled.

"I used to think so sometimes. I confess that a few times I, too, went so far as to think him mad, but when I stopped to analyze the attack I invariably thought differently. Considering his feeling toward me I think he was almost justified. You see, uncle never cared for me. I was so unfortunate as to be the child of his only sister who had been a source of irritation to him from her earliest years. She was many years younger than he, and unwelcomed by him at her birth. Then she married a man whom he abhorred, and against his expressed wishes — for he was her guardian. By the time my father died, when I was an infant, he had dissipated my mother's entire fortune. From that time mother and I were dependent upon the bounty of Uncle Peter. I suppose that one of the greatest crosses of his life was to bring me here to live with him when mother died. He was a man of such strong dislikes I do not wonder that I was an eyesore to him. What is more, I was a little imp, and as soon as I found that uncle disliked me, I took pains to irritate him."

"Did such a condition of affairs exist up to the time of Mr. Somhers' death?"

"There was a little difference. I had perceived the folly of trying to irritate him, and had learned to contain myself under any circumstances when with him; but my self-control seemed to help matters very little, and life was far from peaceful between us."

Milbrath was breaking down unconsciously every sprout of theory that I had nurtured and raised. My thoughts turned to Philander Summerfield, who seemed to have come into the case in a new way.

"Had Mr. Somhers a brother?" I asked.

"Yes. Uncle Francis."

"Still living, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. He died years ago."

"Did he leave a family?"

"He was a bachelor."

"Was there a resemblance between him and Mr. Somhers?"

Milbrath considered.

"He was shorter and fairer, I believe. My recollection of him is, however, rather vague. I was only a little chap when he died."

"You *know* then, that he died?"

Milbrath regarded me with amazement.

"I have seen his grave in Mt. Auburn several times, and I remember when Uncle Peter went to the funeral — soon after I came to live in Winton."

"There was nothing in this brother's life that the family would wish to conceal?"

"Not so far as I ever heard. Indeed, I never

heard much about him in any way. I gathered somehow that relations between the brothers were somewhat strained. I know that Uncle Peter was pretty grouchy when it came to paying the old uncle's debts after his death, but he relented and put a monument over the grave. Come, Mr. Bliss, what card are you holding? Are you theorizing that Uncle Francis is still alive and that it was he who killed Uncle Peter?"

"It is a notion too fantastical, perhaps, to call a theory. I think, however, that we shall find a connection between this Philander Summerfield, who engaged me to come here, and Mr. Somhers' death."

Then I quoted Hutton as to the similarity of voice between the curious old train-catcher and Mr. Somhers, and I added that the description of the man tallied with my remembrance of Mr. Summerfield.

"Granting, however," I went on, "that Francis Somhers lived instead of having died at the time you supposed, and granting also, that for sufficient reasons it was agreed between the brothers to keep his existence a secret, we have a plausible hypothesis as to Mr. Somhers' death and the present curious conditions. We see, then, that the library, hiding the door to the outside, could admit this brother unseen and unknown to every one but Mr. Peter Somhers; and because he is the one who knew the secret entrance, and because bitter disagreements seemed to be a feature between the brothers, we surmise that it was he who, in a moment of anger, became an assassin. It is possible that having committed a crime, he longs to atone for it, yet

has not the moral courage to give himself up to the law. Having engaged me to discover him he fears that I will do so, and endeavors, by intimidation, to force me to leave the place."

Milbrath smiled.

"I wish to be encouraging, but ——"

"Yes; I know. It sounds fantastic —— more like a Frankenstein tale than a possibility. I am going to Boston to-morrow to find, if I can, the workmen who put up the south wing. My idea has been that the secret room lies between the library and the parlors, and I cannot yet understand why four by six feet of space back of the entry was allowed to go to waste. So far, however, I have not been able to find a place where the walls sound hollow."

"We'll tear the wing down if you say so. I should prefer it, if that will help you."

"Not unless I fail in Boston. While I am there I mean to look up our friend, Summerfield. I have asked him to release me, and as he declines to do so he must submit to whatever investigation turns his way."

"I should like to join you in the trip to Boston, and help you if I can. I will act under your instructions."

"Good! Can you start on the eight o'clock morning train?"

Milbrath hesitated. "I fear not," he answered. "There is a purpose in my trip to Winton just now. I have come, indeed, to have a few words with Mr. Kilbourne. If I am able to see him to-night

I will accompany you. Otherwise I will follow on the early afternoon train."

In the ensuing silence it came to me suddenly why Milbrath was in Winton to see Kilbourne. Dolly had, of course, sent for him to inform Kilbourne that, as the prospective Mrs. Milbrath, she could no longer accept the ardent attention which Kilbourne was lavishing upon her. In that moment there was no question in my mind as to Dolly's relation to Milbrath.

This reverie merged — as we smoked in intermittent silence — into a review of the Somhers case, and a new point came to me. If Philander Summerfield were, indeed, Francis Somhers, was it not probable that his money was acquired through Peter Somhers? In that case there must be evidence to that effect somewhere. Perhaps the Winton bank could help me on that point. I resolved to defer my start for Boston for half a day and devote the following morning to an inquiry into the matter.

"Surely you will remain at Overlook to-night," I said as Milbrath rose.

He shook his head a little sadly.

"I have registered at the Winton House this time," he said, "and it is best that I should return there."

"Then plan to lunch here to-morrow. You can talk with Kilbourne before or afterward, as you like. I've decided to delay my start for Boston, and shall call upon Banker Crane in the morning. I want to learn whether Mr. Somhers ever made any checks to this Philander Summerfield. By the

way, in the matter of writing Mr. Somhers left practically nothing. I have looked through every file, trunk and box in the house, but, aside from a few receipts, I've found nothing. I wonder whether he was as careful in what he wrote?"

"Undoubtedly. He answered letters promptly, and his first act afterward was to destroy the ones received. It was one of his axioms that the less one puts on paper and keeps on paper the less one has to trouble about."

"Hum! A curious axiom for an honest man! Well, we shall see what Mr. Crane knows about Mr. Somhers' checks."

Milbrath glanced at his watch.

"Not quite nine yet," he said. "I think I'll surprise Red Gables with a materialization there. I wish you would join me, Bliss."

I should have preferred an hour on the water; but suddenly one of Kilbourne's mottos for success rang in my memory: "Never, without excellent reason, decline an invitation; it may lead you to unexpected information." So I announced that I was ready to accompany him, and a moment later Milbrath and I were threading the triangle of woods.

CHAPTER XXII

A REVELATION

THE screened veranda at Red Gables was bathed in the mellow glow from a dozen delicately tinted Japanese lanterns, and the tinklè of a mandolin and the sound of a deep voice humming a Venetian boating song reached our ears as we approached. We could see through the open French windows into the lighted living room where Mr. McClure and a gentleman, who was a stranger to me, sat before a card table with a chessboard between them. It was Dolly and Kilbourne, then, on the veranda, and on the unlighted end, too, where the moonbeams were beginning to play hide-and-seek with the clematis vines.

As we neared the house I perceived that a third person made up the group upon the veranda, a woman whom Dolly called "godmother Foster," as she introduced me, and who greeted Milbrath in a manner so distant and chilling that a blanket of fog seemed on the moment to envelop us.

Kilbourne was plainly not overjoyed by the arrival of Milbrath, or of me, perhaps, but his spirits were too buoyant that evening to feel a damper for long. Dolly's welcome to Milbrath was to my mind clearly not that of a mere friend, and I wondered how under the sun Kilbourne failed to take the hint.

We sat upon the veranda for a while, but few words were spoken. Dolly continued to finger the mandolin strings in accompaniment to Kilbourne's snatches of song. Presently Mrs. Foster suggested that we go inside and persuade Dolly to sing as Kilbourne had been asking her to do all the evening.

I seconded the motion eagerly, for I understood instinctively that Milbrath's sensitive nerves were quivering in that atmosphere of antagonism toward him and, as Kilbourne hurried ahead to get out the music, I boldly attached myself to Mrs. Foster and, diverting her attention as best I could led her slowly toward the lighted living-room, leaving Dolly and Milbrath for a moment alone among the moonbeams. Looking back in their direction as we crossed the threshold of a window, I observed that Dolly was speaking rapidly, and her raised hand upon Milbrath's shoulder lent the scene the appearance not only of familiarity but of pleading. They seemed loath to part, but when they did so Milbrath found a seat upon a window ledge which gave him a view of the room.

The game of chess was finished, and the players strolled toward the windows, for the night was sultry and the room warm. Mr. McClure's kind old face wore an abstracted, and perhaps a bored, expression, but at sight of Milbrath a glorifying smile changed every feature and he hurried toward him, both hands outstretched.

"This is as it should be, my boy," he cried heartily. "Now you are on the right road. Welcome! Welcome!"

I did not hear Milbrath's answer. All my attention at that moment was given to the stranger who also had caught sight of the returned wanderer, and who directly and deliberately turned his back upon him and their host and stood gazing with abstracted interest at an engraving of Stuart's "Washington" upon the wall.

Three times Mr. McClure spoke before the stranger turned with a well-feigned start.

"Mr. Foster," said Mr. McClure in his exquisitely modulated accents, "certainly you remember our Harry who has been almost as dear to me as my Dolly? His beard does change his appearance, I know."

Mr. Foster grappled the line of excuse thrown out to him and approached Milbrath cautiously.

"To be sure! To be sure!" he exclaimed in high nasal tones. By gad! What demd changes time does work!" and he lifted a monocle and regarded Milbrath as if he were a rare specimen of the genus man.

Mr. McClure interrupted the observation by introducing me, and then seated himself upon the tête-à-tête by the side of Mrs. Foster who graciously drew to herself her voluminous skirts in smiling invitation to him and at once focused her attention upon him.

Mr. Foster turned from us irresolutely, plainly unwilling to further address himself to Milbrath, and, taking advantage of the moment, I seated myself at Milbrath's side.

Dolly, who had observed the comedy just enacted,

after a doubtful glance at Mr. Foster, turned away from him with an expression that said plainly that the good man could now find a companion for himself. And she ran a defiant scale upon the piano before beginning her song.

I had never heard the air, but Milbrath told me that it was Dolly's adaptation of a Mendelssohn "Song Without Words," and the lines I knew to be from Tennyson.

I now cannot recall the first words. I was listening to the air and watching the girl's face.

"Love then had hope of richer store;
What end is there to my complaint,"

she sang, her eyes upon the pictured face of St. Cecilia above the piano —

"This haunting whisper makes me faint,
More years had made me love thee more."

Was it simply the music sympathetically rendered, or was it more than art that gave to those last lines the plaintive suggestion of unshed tears and held the room in tense silence as the final chords sang themselves to sleep upon the keyboard? A sigh passed through the room, and with it the spell, and directly everyone was as before — everyone save Harrison Milbrath and myself, Milbrath who deserted his place at my side and joined Dolly, and I who walked down to that end of the veranda where bars of silver light fell aslant the floor.

My mind was perturbed and ill at ease. I felt the nearness of something that I could neither grasp nor define, something that had to do with Dolly and

Milbrath. For at those last words she had turned her eyes — seas of sapphire at the minute — from the picture above and before her, to Milbrath beside me upon the window ledge. There was an expression in them that defied my analysis or comprehension. That those two were affianced offered an explanation that was satisfactory only in part.

My eyes wandered across Winton neck to the bay and to sedate Beverly already losing herself in sleep. A few sail boats at anchor near the shore, their white wings drawn and folded, rocked gently on the coming tide and in the shifting shadows of the clouds resembled spirit ships, illusive and unreal.

There came to me as I stood there a remembrance of the words that Dolly had spoken that afternoon when she and I were drifting about in the rowboat.

“Sometimes it maddens me,” she had said, “to think that the days and months and years are passing and we seem just as far as ever from finding who is to blame, who is responsible for these blighted years and heartaches!”

What despair had rung in her young voice!

Suddenly I seemed to see the printed report of a certain day in Milbrath's last trial, the day that the elderly clergyman testified that Milbrath had been with him at the probable hour of Mr. Somhers' death. He had cleverly prevented a reading between the lines at the time, but in that moment of retrospection the situation stood revealed to me. Harrison Milbrath had been married on that day! And to whom but to Dolly McClure? I marveled

that I had not thought of this before, that the whole world had not taken the hint.

But why had they guarded their secret to so great a sacrifice to Milbrath? I knew the answer even as I asked myself. Because of Milbrath's Quixotic notions; because, as Dolly had said in reference to another matter, he would not have her name dragged before the public.

After that revelation I stood so long in silence staring at the moonlit land and sea that Mr. McClure called to me.

"I believe you were moon-gazing," he said banteringly, but with a sharp glance at me, "and we all know what that means. You are wanted inside — a prospective boatride or something of the kind."

Kilbourne and Mrs. Foster were planning a morning picnic to Shell Cove.

"Old Brown will sail us over and we'll breakfast under the trees. Can't you defer that tiresome trip and join us, laddie?" Kilbourne asked as I came up.

"I'd like to, but another affair has developed."

"Better cut it and come."

A moment later I observed that Milbrath had slipped away. Only Dolly and Mr. McClure seemed to know that he was gone. I made my adieux brief, and hurrying after him overtook him just as he was leaving the grounds.

"Will you not — see Kilbourne to-night?" I asked.

Milbrath looked at me keenly. Then he shook his head.

"It would only spoil the morning party, and so

far as I can see no harm is likely to come of waiting another half day."

"Perhaps not. Still, you never can tell about Kilbourne. I'm convinced now that he is genuinely in love with Dolly, and as it's the first attack of the kind that he's ever had it is hard to tell when he will break out."

I drew closer to Milbrath until we touched shoulders.

"I know all your secret now, you see," I said. "You are willing?"

"I am glad," Milbrath answered simply and caught my hand in a hearty grasp. "Now you understand why I abandoned the European trip — what has brought me to Winton."

I nodded.

"But I can't understand why I was blind for so long, or how you have managed to hold your secret," I said.

"I cannot understand how we escaped. As it was Mr. Longman could scarcely be made to keep his promise of secrecy. Mr. Longman was the clergyman, you know, and a friend of Mr. McClure's. He declared that the case needed his testimony, and it was only upon my most earnest pleading that he kept quiet until my second trial."

"But merciful Heavens, man, why did you keep quiet, or want him to? Think what a statement of the facts would have saved you! In the first place you would never have been held by the coroner's jury."

Milbrath groaned.

"Yes, yes; if I had done so. But I am one of those unfortunates who see things only from behind. We had agreed to keep our marriage secret for a year, Dolly and I, or until such a time as I could provide for her with my own earnings, and at first I saw no reason for changing our plans. I never dreamed of being accused of taking uncle's life, and even when the coroner's verdict came in against me the charge seemed too absurd to hold and I expected to be acquitted after trial. At that time it seemed as if it ought to be easy to detect the real criminal, and I was full of hope for what would happen when I was free again. By the time of the second trial I saw things differently."

"Even then it was not too late to vindicate yourself by a statement of facts," I argued.

"It was too late unless I dragged Dolly into it, my patient little Dolly! And do you think I would do that? Great God, Bliss, think of it! Would you want the name of the woman you love, or of your sister, if you have one, on every tongue in connection with such a case? Had I seen the end from the beginning — understood that I should be under suspicion unless I revealed the truth, I might have done differently."

"Did Mr. Somhers know of your plan to marry?"

"I think that he surmised it, and it was a great irritation to him. He liked Dolly and told me frequently that she was altogether too good for me. On that last day when I announced to him that I meant to strike out for myself, and should not return

again to Overlook until I was independent, he taunted me with the probable long wait that I should have before I should again see Dolly. It was that last quarrel, more than all the rest, I believe, that broke me up afterward. That he was murdered was bad enough, but that he had gone suddenly, with my angry, bitter words still rankling in his heart, as I knew that they would rankle, was what told on me."

Milbrath appeared to have spoken the last sentences more to himself than to me.

"I cared more for the governor than I thought, I suppose," he added, and his voice shook.

"Does Mr. McClure know that his little girl is Mrs. Milbrath?"

"Yes; he was with us in Boston and returned to Winton with her directly following the ceremony. Like Mr. Longman he fretted against his secrecy and my obstinacy. Poor old man! If only I could have seen things as I see them now! I could have saved many a heartache."

"And now it is for Kilbourne to know," I reflected aloud, and I realized that another heartache would be the result.

"He must be told — for the sake of his happiness as well as for Dolly," Milbrath said soberly.

Half an hour later I stepped into Kilbourne's room.

"You'll be back to-morrow in time for lunch?" I asked.

"Sure thing, unless you'd prefer to have me stay away."

"On the contrary, I should like to have you here without fail. Mr. Milbrath will lunch with us for the express purpose of having a few words with you."

"With me? Me! Do my ears deceive me?"

"Hardly. I said 'to have a few words with *you*.'"

Kilbourne was shaving and his cheeks were covered with lather, but he lowered his razor and turning about stared at me absently for a second. I do not think that a suspicion of what Milbrath would have to say to him crossed his mind.

"I'll be here for the lunch, laddie, if I must be; but don't ask too much of me," he replied.

As I passed out of the room he called:

"Better come along in the morning. We'll be off about seven."

For a while after I returned to my room I puffed fiercely at my blackest pipe and through the rings of smoke sent upward meditated to the ceiling upon the events of the evening. Presently my "Black Beauty" failed in comfort. I began to be tortured by a consciousness that it was up to me to prepare Kilbourne's mind for what Milbrath had to tell him, that I should have done so, in spite of the picnic, before we parted for the night. I knew Kilbourne's capacity for suffering, and I feared that a blow that touched his heart would be the hardest blow to bear.

There had been times that I could recall when I had thought that some sharp misfortune or failure that touched his pride or his heart was what Kilbourne needed to rouse him to a realization of his

own egotistical and, in many respects, wholly selfish attitude toward life. Something to stimulate his sympathies, to put him in closer touch with the tears of the world, and to help him recall more often that the earth did not revolve for Kilbourne alone, might mean to develop the kindly traits of his naturally generous and noble character. But he was my friend, and I dreaded to see the reforming agent arrive.

Dawn streaked the horizon when, at last, I fell asleep, and day was astir and well on with her housework when again I opened my eyes and saw that the hands of the little clock on the dressing-table pointed to seven-thirty.

I sprang up, appalled at the lateness of the hour, and ran to the window to see whether Brown's boat had made a start. The marine glasses, which I called to Gaspard to bring, showed me that she was well past the lighthouse, moving swiftly before a fresh breeze. There was, therefore, nothing to do but await Kilbourne's return.

I dressed hastily and went out to the walk on the bluff where for half an hour I paced with the sweet sea and grass-scented air in my face and awaited Gaspard's call to breakfast.

CHAPTER XXIII

BANKER CRANE LENDS A HAND

AS I drove into town a few hours later, I watched in vain for Milbrath, hoping to meet him and persuade him to join me in the visit to the bank. The president of the bank of Winton was easy of access, for he was likewise its cashier and its teller. We had met before, so there was no need to make myself known, except in the rôle of investigator of the mystery of Overlook. Then I told him that I had come to solicit his assistance.

He regarded me steadily for a moment, and then gravely informed me that if to give me help were consistent with the honor of his position he should be pleased to do all in his power. Whereupon I asked him without circumvention whether to his knowledge and remembrance Mr. Somhers ever drew a check to one Philander Summerfield.

"He drew several to Philander Summerfield," Mr. Crane answered promptly.

"At close intervals?"

"All that I know of were drawn within two months."

"And the last?"

"The last was dated about fifteen days before Mr. Somhers' death and was deposited in the Second National Bank of New York three days later."

"Was this last check for a large amount?"

"For thirty thousand dollars."

"Ah! You have an extraordinary memory, Mr. Crane."

"I have reason to remember these instances. The first checks would have made no more impression upon my memory than any others that Mr. Somhers drew through our little bank, had it not been for this last large amount, which I had only just secured at Mr. Somhers' request on some P. & U. bonds.

"Were these facts of no value in the search for the assassin of Mr. Somhers?"

"They appeared not to be. I made mention of the last check to the chief of police, as it seemed to me that it might have a bearing upon the case, but he and his colleagues declared it to be without probable connection, as the return voucher was in my hands fully a week before the crime."

"Did Mr. Milbrath's counsel agree with the police?"

"I did not refer the matter to them. Upon further consideration, I concluded that the police were doubtless right. Moreover, it is hardly politic for me to publish, without important reason, the affairs of our clients."

"I dare say. Do you, however, happen to know anything about this Philander Summerfield?"

"Nothing whatever."

"It seems to me that you were quite right in feeling that the reason for so large a check should have been explained before the coroner, or, at least, at Mr. Milbrath's trials, and I shall endeavor to go

back a few years and look for the receiver of the check. Does any other point occur to you that may be useful to me?"

Mr. Crane deliberated.

"I fear not, Mr. Bliss. I wish you every success, however, and I hope that every vestige of doubt may be removed from Harry, if the law was quite right in its last judgment of the case."

We shook hands after this cautious expression of good will, and I went out into the street and up to the post office, where the "faculty" was holding its usual morning session upon the piazza. I joined them, and for an hour listened to the desultory gossip.

Just before noon I drove back to Overlook, and found that Milbrath was already there.

"I think I can show you the route from here to the Winton station taken by your mysterious visitor," he said as I came up. "There is a trail that I used when I was a lad, and sometimes of late years, even, when I raced over to watch the trains. I came through it to-day, and there are evidences that it is still used occasionally." He made a diagram with a pencil on a piece of paper which showed me a cut through the woods of which I had no knowledge.

"Who besides you knew of this trail?" I asked.

"Why, I can't be sure that anyone did. The few chaps that uncle permitted me to associate with, uncle himself and Joe Arms are the ones most likely to learn of it. And the boys are either dead or gone from town," he added reflectively.

"Has Kilbourne returned?"

"I think not. I called at Red Gables and found Mr. McClure alone. We talked for an hour, and when I came over here the others had not put in an appearance. Did you see Mr. Crane?"

"Yes," I answered, and repeated the conversation that I had with the banker. Milbrath became excited.

"By George!" he cried. "We'll look that up as soon as we reach Boston. I don't remember any vouchers, but doubtless they are with a pile of truck that has been in a deposit vault for the past six months. The indorsement on the check ought to prove whether the old fellow who pressed you into commission is the one who got the money from uncle. Certainly there were never two of that name."

At that moment we were interrupted by Gaspard, who declared that our lunch would be spoiled if we delayed eating it for another minute. A glance at my watch showed me that it was already half an hour past the usual lunch time; so we went inside.

The hour passed without the appearance of Kilbourne, and I confess that I felt considerably nettled by his conduct. He had no right to ignore the request of Milbrath, who, as owner of Overlook, was, in point of fact, his host. So I sent Gaspard to Red Gables to inquire whether the party had returned from their sail, and to ask Mr. Kilbourne whether he had forgotten that he was to lunch with me.

During Gaspard's absence Milbrath grew silent, and sat in an absorbed attitude under a great tree

on the lawn, a paper which he did not read in his hands.

"Zay have arrivé, m'sieu. Zay all eat on zee grass — so," Gaspard announced with a flourish. "Zee m'sieu Ke-bourne vill come — how he zay? — pre-sent-ly."

I knew from that form of answer that Kilbourne had not forgotten his engagement with me, but had indolently ignored my request to return to Overlook to lunch because of the fascination of the moment at the other end of the line. That was Kilbourne to the letter. Nevertheless I felt my indignation getting beyond bounds. I perceived that Milbrath saw the matter in its true light, but he took it sensibly.

A half-hour, perhaps, passed in silence during which we both made a pretense at reading. Then Milbrath rose from the ground where, for a time, he had been lying face downward and shook himself like a great Newfoundland dog.

"I have an Indian's habit of listening from the ground," he said, "and an Indian's ear for footsteps. I think it is Kilbourne approaching. If you will excuse me I will go to meet him." He walked leisurely down the roadway, and near the entrance Kilbourne and he met.

I had returned to the portico, and looking down I saw them at that moment. I turned away, sorry to my heart's core for Kilbourne. I felt that in Dolly McClure he had found the one woman who could hold his affection through a lifetime, and that the loss of her would mean at first a crushing

sense of the world's incompleteness and later, in his books, an idealization of femininity by the side of which all others would be found lacking.

I turned into the house, loath to meet Kilbourne just then, but he came directly to me in the library and closed the door behind him. His face was livid, and there was an expression of pain such as I never dreamed to see in his deep-set, dark eyes. He crossed the room and flung himself into the reading chair. Resting his head against the high back he closed his eyes.

I made a pretense of writing as I sat before the desk, but my pen dragged, and at length I let it drop and turned toward Kilbourne. From the twitch of his eyelids I could see that he was thinking rapidly, not resting, and presently his eyes opened full upon me. He glanced at the little Swiss clock that ticked upon the wall; then he rose and came to me.

"There is a train at four. I must take it. Will you arrange?"

I nodded. "Kilbourne," I began, but he interrupted me with a motion.

"Don't!" he cried brokenly. "I know, but I cannot hear it. Lad, what did I tell you about — Milbrath?" He shivered as if with cold. "Will you again doubt my intuition?"

I did not answer.

"But I knew it from her first. Good God, Elmer, to think that in my ignorance I put her to that — my Dolly whom I would shield and spare!"

He covered his face with his hands and rocked

back and forth. The man had forgotten himself in the love he held for the girl he had pained, and, for a time at least, the egotist was translated into a man of grief.

Presently he touched me on the shoulder. The act was a caress.

"Laddie," he said, "I must be alone and — think."

I rose at once and pushed my chair toward him.

"I will see Gaspard about the carriage and come for you when it is ready. There is yet an hour before you need to leave here," I answered, and left the room.

On the portico steps I found Milbrath whittling a stick. He looked perturbed and pale.

"I'm going to Boston this afternoon, you know, though it must be on the later train," he said and looked inquiringly at me.

"I will join you in the morning. My plans are changed for to-day," and I referred to Kilbourne's proposed departure. "Gaspard will drive you to the station."

"I must return first to the Winton House, and I will drive over from there. No, thanks, I will not drive in. It is only a short walk to the hotel by my trail."

He extended his hand as he spoke, and a moment later he had disappeared among the trees on the lawn.

I went to the stable and waited until the horses were hitched.

When I drove up to the house, Kilbourne stood in

the doorway, suitcase in hand. He came out silently and paused with one foot on the carriage step as he looked lovingly over the place, his eyes taking in the sweep of the green lawn, the curve of the bluff, the stretch of ocean beyond the bay; and I knew that in spite of the grief in his heart and the feeling that he held toward Milbrath there still remained for him a powerful attraction in this "place of silence."

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. SUMMERFIELD ELUDES

WHEN I reached Boston on the following day, I had no difficulty in finding Milbrath, for he stood in the door of the Parker House, his face full of excitement.

"You look as if you 'd had the time of your life," I said. "What's up?"

"I've seen your Summerfield and he led me a chase, I can tell you!" He laughed somewhat ruefully as he added: "I'll have to confess that in the end I proved myself an ass."

"That, no doubt, is a matter of opinion. How did you reach the conclusion?"

"Why, I followed the old chap and — but to start at the beginning. I opened my operations this morning with a visit to the deposit vault, where I looked over a box full of papers that were turned over to me by the executors of uncle's will. It contained mortgages and bonds, insurance policies and signed notes principally, on none of which I found the name of Philander Summerfield. There were two checks made to him, however, and here they are."

Milbrath produced them, and before they were in my hands I recognized on their backs the small, cramped handwriting that Murray Kilbourne was

the first to declare assumed, the indorsement of "Philander H. Summerfield." His second initial he had not given to me, but the two persons were undoubtedly the same.

"This is Mr. Somhers' hand?" I asked, indicating the face of the check.

Milbrath assented.

I drew forth a bill receipted by "J. A. Rice, M. D., Beacon Street, Boston," for services rendered Mr. Francis Somhers from January to September, 18—, to which was pinned the voucher for the check given at that time by Mr. Peter Somhers in payment of the bill, and compared the writing on the two checks. They were written by the same hand and although an interval of years lay between their dates there was no appreciable change in the chirography. In both cases it was upright and firm.

"Your uncle retained an extraordinarily youthful hand," I remarked. "It looks like the writing of an even-tempered man."

"Uncle Peter was scarcely that, but he rarely displayed temper to anyone but me. Now, here is another check that, because of its size, may interest you."

It was made to "Albert Emerson," and was for ten thousand dollars. It showed deposit in the First National Bank of Boston and was drawn on May 5th, 1892, five months before Mr. Somhers' death.

"It would be interesting to know for what services these large checks were given," I remarked. "But, how did you get at Summerfield?"

"I went from the deposit vaults to the post office, hoping to learn something there about the old gentleman, but I made no headway. I took a look at Box 940, and saw a letter there plainly addressed to Philander Summerfield. It was postmarked New York four days ago. That seemed proof that the old fellow had not visited the post office in three days and I thought it was worth while to wait around a bit and take a chance on his coming this morning.

"I had not long to wait, as it happened. Within half an hour I observed an elderly man who tallied with your description of Summerfield. He entered the section where Box 940 is located and where I stood, pretending to be absorbed in a list of un-called-for letters. I was the only person in there, and he paused, probably to see whether he knew me, darted like a ferret to the box and extracted the letter, then whisked around and, with another glance at me, was out of the room in a twinkling.

"It was then that I made my mistake, for I followed him at once. I stepped as softly as possible (and I wear rubber heels), but the old fellow must be in fear of being tracked, for at the entrance door he turned abruptly and looked at me.

"I endeavored to appear unconcerned, but his move was so unexpected that I dare say I betrayed my surprise. His whiskers parted in a sardonic grin and upon my soul, Mr. Bliss, for one instant I thought that my uncle Peter stood before me. Many are the times that I have seen just such an expression on uncle's face when he was upbraiding

me, and this man's eyes were half closed in the same demoniacal fashion. I assure you I'm ready enough now to accept your suggestion that Summerfield is a relative.

"Well, I had enough presence of mind to assume an expression of surprise at his manner and turn to a writing table by a window. From the corner of my eye I watched him leave the building and enter a herdic that stood by the curb, and drive away.

"Within another minute I, too, was in a herdic and in hot pursuit, for I meant to see where the old man put up if it cost a fortune, and I instructed my driver somewhat to that effect.

"For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, we whirled along, up one street and down another until we were well away from downtown. I think, from the way we dodged about, that Summerfield believed he was being followed and hoped by his devious course to evade me.

"Suddenly we slowed down. There had been an accident of some kind in the street ahead of us and the road was blocked by people and carriages. Summerfield had got ahead of the crowd and turned at the next corner. There was nothing for us to do but turn around, dash down a parallel street to the next turn and come out presently in view again of a herdic which we had every reason to believe the one that we were following. After a few minutes my driver looked down.

" 'The fare ahead, sir, has drove up to a block,' he said.

" 'Then drive very slowly past him,' I answered.

"My man gave a surprised whistle. 'Gee!' he exclaimed, 'It ain't the same!'

"And it was not. The carriage ahead of us had carried a lady and child who were mounting a doorstep at that moment, and as we passed their herdic I saw that they had been alone in it. Without doubt we made our mistake when we had to turn back.

"I can't help thinking how pleased old Summerfield must be to think that he gave me the slip so easily! Do you suppose that he fears being tracked and is continually on the lookout for sleuths?"

"Your experience with him makes it seem that way. There's certainly a screw loose with the old gentleman, and I'll notify him to-day that I will positively take no more money from him, nor longer consider myself in his service. Indeed, I think that he will have to explain his conduct, anyway, or I shall go openly on his track. Did he remind you of Mr. Somhers aside from his expression at the moment?"

"I hardly know. He is shorter, I think, and stoops. Uncle was quite erect. He is considerably older, too, I should judge, but a beard makes a great difference in a man's appearance. Uncle wore only a mustache."

"Was Mr. Francis Somhers older?"

"I am not certain. I think he was younger."

"Well, when we have finished here, we'll call upon this Dr. Rice, if you don't object. Perhaps he can help us settle the question of whether Francis Somhers, whom he treated, actually died."

"I'm with you. The sooner we get some light on these points, the better satisfied I shall be."

At five o'clock, accordingly, after I had mailed a brief note to Mr. Summerfield, in which I notified him that I was in Boston and must request him to grant me an interview and be prepared to explain his connection with the late Peter Somhers or permit me to waive my contract with him, Milbrath and I found ourselves being admitted by a neatly gowned maid to a waiting-room in a pretentious English basement house in the then most fashionable quarter of Boston; for we had found Dr. Rice's address without difficulty.

There were a number of patients ahead of us, but when we took our turn the room in which we sat was vacated save by ourselves. I had caught an occasional glimpse of Dr. Rice, as his door opened and closed. He was a short, florid man of fifty, perhaps, given to a blandness of speech which seems so often to accompany his type of figure. By prearrangement I acted as spokesman and, presenting my card, I introduced Milbrath as my friend Mr. Nelson.

"We are here, Dr. Rice, to consult you on a matter rather different, I fancy, from your general run of cases," I said, and the doctor bestowed upon us a quick, inscrutable glance as he motioned us to chairs. "I have been put in charge of some matters relating to the estate of the late Peter Somhers of Winton, whose tragic death two years ago you may recall?"

The doctor inclined his head slightly, but from

his expression I learned nothing as to whether the name stirred any other recollections.

"I find it important to learn more of the death about sixteen years ago of Mr. Somhers' brother, Francis Somhers, who was, I believe, your patient at that time."

Dr. Rice laughed mirthlessly.

"You ask a good deal of a busy man's memory," he said. "Sixteen years is a considerable time to remember a patient of ordinary interest."

"I appreciate the truth of your words, and so far as I know there was nothing in this Mr. Somhers' case to render it more likely to be remembered than any one of a dozen others that you may have had in the same year. But your practice was doubtless more limited at that time, and if you will permit me to tell you what I know of Mr. Somhers' last days it is possible that you may recall him."

Quickly I related what Milbrath had told me of the last stages of his uncle's career. But the doctor's face remained impassive.

"The description fits a large number of cases that I have had," he said.

"Will this photograph help you?" It was a picture that I had found the evening before in an album of photographs at Overlook. It was marked "Francis Somhers, 1875," so was unmistakable.

Dr. Rice shook his head after a moment's study.

"This receipt, then, which shows that your bill was paid by Mr. Peter Somhers?"

Dr. Rice scrutinized the receipt.

"It is mine, undoubtedly," he said handing

it back to me, "but I regret that it stirs no recollection."

I gazed at the doctor's impassive face for a full second with the conviction that either the picture or the bill had, notwithstanding his assertion, awakened some recollection which he was withholding. Then I rose.

"It is useless, then, to trouble you further at present," I said. "Later I may be able to present some point, if you will permit me, that will rouse your memory. I hope so, at least, for it is important that I obtain some facts regarding Mr. Somhers' last illness which only his physician at the time can give me. I thank you, Dr. Rice, for the time that you have given me."

"That is not to be considered," responded the doctor cautiously, betraying in the phrase his Pennsylvania origin. Then he hesitated perceptibly. "If you will call at this hour to-morrow I may have some news for you," he said as we gained the entrance door. "It has been my custom from my earliest practice to keep a record of my patients, the nature of their maladies, their constitutional peculiarities and, frequently, of features personal to them or to the case. I will endeavor to get at the record book for that year," and the doctor made an entry in a tiny book that he drew from his coat pocket.

"Well, we did n't make a whole lot from *that* trip," commented Milbrath cheerfully as we stepped into the herdic that had brought us.

"And I doubt whether we shall make much more

when we return to-morrow. It looks a little as if the doctor were hiding a card or two from us. Of course he may merely wish to prove his surmises before he speaks, which caused him to put us off."

"I suppose it is possible for Uncle Francis to be alive and for Dr. Rice to know nothing of the fact," said Milbrath thoughtfully.

"His bill shows that he treated Mr. Somhers up to the month that you believe him to have died," I responded.

"Well, if that fossil I saw yesterday proves to be Uncle Francis," Milbrath said, "I'm willing to go shares with him on the money and property question, but I'm afraid my interest in him would die there. But he is not Uncle Francis," he added presently with a return of his cheerful confidence. "Uncle Francis died when I was a boy. This Summerfield is some one else, though perhaps a distant relative whom I have never known."

"Perhaps my letter will bring a solution to that point very soon. I think, however, we had better continue to work along the lines we have mapped out. To-morrow we will make an effort to get hold of one or more of those men who put up the south wing. To-night we might, perhaps, take a step toward learning where Summerfield left the herdic this morning."

"How? What do you mean?"

"By advertisement. What do you think of this?" I tore a sheet from my notebook and on it wrote:

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Fifty dollars reward for the number of the herdic that on August 30th, about ten o'clock in the morning, before the general post office, took in an elderly man with gray hair, gray whiskers, blue eyes, and rounded shoulders. Old man may have driven to post office in same herdic. N., Room 34, Parker House.

"That's all right. It ought to be fruitful of results, unless Summerfield has already offered as good an inducement for the driver's silence."

"A possibility, of course. We'll insert this in every daily paper in the city, however. Come, we are near the *Globe* office now, and we can telephone from there to the other papers. After that I vote for dinner."

CHAPTER XXV

A DISCOVERY

THE information that I had been able to obtain concerning the men who did the alterations at Overlook was confined to the name of Johnson, and he, from his clothes, was presumed to be a mason. The name of Johnson in the Boston directory ran into a list quite appalling in length, and I took the addresses of nine who were designated as masons, and of five whose occupation was given as carpenter, while Milbrath looked up the only "Summerfield" who appeared in the directory. He proved to be young, and was ignorant of the existence of the man we sought.

We decided to defer our first calls until evening, and, at the appointed hour, we found ourselves again waiting in Dr. Rice's outer office. Almost immediately that gentleman appeared at the door and motioned us into his consulting room.

"I think that I may be a trifle helpful to-night, gentlemen," he said, extending a strong "square" hand.

"I am rejoiced to have you say so. You have recalled the case of Mr. Francis Somhers?"

"I was able to get at my old records, and while I am enabled to bring up only a fleeting recollection of the man, I have here some data concerning the case."

'As he spoke the doctor drew from a drawer in his desk a large, gray-covered book labeled conspicuously : "Records: 18—."

"I think, Mr. Bliss, that I am still in doubt as to just what kind of information you desire about Mr. Somhers' case."

"The nature of his malady, for one thing."

"Ah, that will be easily ascertained, I think. Here! 'Mr. Francis Somhers, United States Hotel. First call made January 17th; patient expired two P. M., Saturday, September 18th. Cause: cardiac stenosis.' In unprofessional English, gentlemen, a valvular disease of the heart."

"A lingering disease, I suppose?"

"Mr. Somhers appears to have suffered from it for years. I have here a memorandum to that effect."

"You recall Mr. Somhers sufficiently well to be *certain* that he died?"

With a short forefinger marking a line Dr. Rice looked over his spectacles at me, his round blue eyes wide in question and surprise.

"There can be no doubt that he died."

"No possibility that circulation was restored after life appeared extinct?"

"I do not know your purpose, Mr. Bliss, in making these extraordinary inquiries. I can only say that it is highly improbable that resuscitation was effected. Everything that science knew at that time was probably done to save Mr. Somhers and, to my best knowledge and belief, without avail. If he has appeared to be alive at any time since Sep-

tember 18th, 18—, I cannot explain the phenomenon. Is there any other point, Mr. Bliss?"

I had followed Dr. Rice's words and expression closely and they left no room for reasonable doubt as to his sincerity. I observed that Milbrath was of like mind.

"You have satisfied me fully," I responded. "It may interest you to have me explain that those nearest in kin to the late Mr. Francis Somhers have had some reason of late to feel that he might still be living, and if he be alive it is of the greatest conceivable importance that he be found."

Dr. Rice closed the book of records and replaced it methodically in the drawer from which he had taken it.

"May I ask whether you have seen the man thought to be Mr. Somhers?"

"I saw him once, but it was after I lost track of him that I first had occasion to attach connection between him and the Somhers family."

"You showed me a photograph of Mr. Somhers. Have you the picture with you this evening?"

I produced it and handed it to the doctor who gazed at it thoughtfully but with no change of expression.

"Allowing for a difference in age the face is very like an office patient whom I have treated occasionally during the past year."

My heart leaped into my throat, and I noted Milbrath's sharp intake of breath.

"Will you favor me with the name of your patient, doctor?"

"Your case hinges, do I understand correctly, upon proving whether Mr. Francis Somhers died or is still living?"

"Precisely."

"You will find, I feel sure, that Mr. Somhers' record closed with the one I made of his troubles. My present patient bears the name of Summerfield, P. H. Summerfield."

"Ah! Can you give me the address of this Mr. Summerfield?"

"I regret that I cannot do so. As I have said, he has been an office patient and my relations with him have been confined to consultations here."

Dr. Rice's manner now reflected signs of polite impatience. I recalled that his dinner was doubtless waiting.

"We are greatly obliged to you, Dr. Rice," I said, "I will endeavor to locate Mr. Summerfield and learn whether he is the man we seek. You can hardly say, I suppose, when he is likely to call upon you again?"

"I have not the remotest idea."

"Then I will bid you good evening, Dr. Rice."

When we were again in the street Milbrath slapped me across the shoulders.

"Our case strengthens!" he cried, "but what infernal luck we have in getting at the old fellow."

"If it comes to that we can give a description of him into the hands of four detectives and have Dr. Rice's house watched day and night until we get him, although of course he may never visit Dr. Rice again."

Milbrath considered. Then he pulled me by the sleeve.

"Come, let us be off to an agency and get the men to work at once. I'm willing to risk the cost of the men for a few weeks on the chance of getting him ultimately. Hi! There's a herdic turning down Marlborough Street," and he whistled for it.

We entered the vehicle and drove to the Pingree Detective Agency, where we engaged men who were detailed for immediate duty.

When we returned to the hotel I found a special delivery note, forwarded by Gaspard, from Kilbourne in which he announced that he had taken passage on a steamer sailing on Saturday for Liverpool and implored me to come to town and stay with him for at least a few hours before that time.

I felt that I could ill afford to spare time just then for any personal matter, but I felt, also, that I owed Kilbourne too much to refuse his request without urgent reason. Therefore I wired him that I would join him on the following afternoon, and then communicated my change of programme to Milbrath.

"I think I understand how you feel about leaving," he said, "but you really need n't be bothered. You've given me a very fair idea of how to go ahead, you know, and I believe that I can keep things in hand for a few days."

"Then I think I'll stop at Overlook on my way back. If my mysterious visitor with unsigned warnings is Summerfield it is probable, I suppose, that he lit out for somewhere when he found you on his

track, and as likely as not he dropped off at Overlook."

I was shocked at first by the appearance of Kilbourne, when he met me at the Grand Central Station and inquired at once about his health; but I soon saw that the change was psychical rather than physical — that the expression of his eyes, which altered his whole aspect, denoted a change in mind rather than in health. His sympathies had, indeed, been quickened by his trouble. He inquired with more interest than I had known him to display about the progress of my case, and he spoke kindly of Milbrath.

"I hope you'll clear him," he said in conclusion, "for he's a *man* if ever there was one. But, my God, Bliss! he has ruined *my* happiness! After this you can scarcely laugh at my 'old womanish fancies,' as you call them. How many of them have given me the lie?" He turned from me sadly, and I had nothing to say.

It was of this new Kilbourne that I thought many, many times during the year and a half that intervened between our meetings: for the next that I saw of him was when I joined him in Vienna.

It was ten o'clock on Sunday morning when I arrived in Beverly. Gaspard met me with the runabout and I saw at once that he was inflated with suppressed excitement; but I waited until we were well on the road to Overlook before I encouraged him to speak.

"Zings happen when m'sieu leaves," he said. "Yesterday come zee man bent like zis and old, ask-

ing for m'sieu. Mon dieu! He look like — vhat you call it? zee — de-scrip-sion of zee homme m'sieu seeks!”

“Yesterday, did you say? At what time?”

“Near zee noon, m'sieu.”

Had Summerfield waited two days, then, after knowing that he was followed before leaving Boston? If such were the case he had probably received my note and realized that I was no longer his friend. Perhaps he had come to Winton to reason with me and explain.

“Tell me just how he acted and what he said, Gaspard.”

“Ma foi! He vas — vhat you call it? — pe-cu-liar.”

“In what way peculiar?”

“Vell, he ring virst at zee front door. ‘I speak vid zee M'sieu Blees,’ he say.

“‘Non; M'sieu Blees n'est pas ici.’

“He smile.

“‘Ah!’ zay he, ‘an’ vhere he iss?’

“I vould zay not'ing but: ‘He vill return after a lee-tle.’

“‘M'sieu he iss avay?’

“‘Oui, m'sieu.’

“‘Vhere?’

“‘Zat I canno' zay. M'sieu Blees he have many zings to do: to-day ici — to-morrow — ah! who can tell?’”

“Good, Gaspard. And then?”

“M'sieu turn avay.

“‘I vill again come,’ he zay. Von hour later

I go to zee zide door, for rap comes zere. Standing zere is zee old m'sieu.

" 'M'sieu Blees, iss he ici?'

" 'Non, m'sieu. Il n'est pas arrivé.'

" He smile more.

" 'An' vhere he iss?'

" I zay again zee ferry words I zay before, an' off starts m'sieu. I vatch him. He go down zee valk and zit on a bench in zee garden. I vatch him zome, zen I vork. Four times more come m'sieu. He zay zee zame zings. I zay zame — vhat you call 'em — anzers?

" He smile each time I zay: 'M'sieu Blees n'est pas arrivé.' Each time he go zit down on garden bench and by 'n' by be gone."

" He left no message? "

" Non, m'sieu."

I considered for a moment the advisability of driving to the hotel to ascertain whether Philander Summerfield was there or had been there, but I decided against doing so. If Summerfield really wished to see me he would call again; if his plan were to mystify or annoy me (as seemed possible from his erratic conduct as described by Gaspard), he would take care to get away from Winton before I returned.

I decided to drive into town and inquire of Hutton whether his old traveler had appeared for the seven o'clock train the previous evening. So I dropped Gaspard at the gates of Overlook and continued on to Winton. Hutton had just got in from church service and sat in his wife's big rocker on

the piazza of his cottage looking uncomfortable and unfamiliar in his Sunday clothes. He had not seen Summerfield since the day he told me about the old gentleman, and I took my departure presently when a vociferous call to dinner sounded from the inner regions of the cottage, no wiser than I had been before my visit.

I stopped at the post office, which was open for a few minutes about noon, and found a letter from Milbrath which was entertaining in a description of the experience he had had in getting at *the* Johnson. It was a curious fact that though he had not yet found Johnson he had happened upon one of the four men who built the wing. This man, while heavy and stupid, was honest, and no persuasion on Milbrath's part induced him to commit himself on the subject of the addition. He had been well paid by the "crazy old gent" to keep his mouth shut, and had sworn, literally on a stack of Bibles, he said, never to reveal the secret of the construction or to discuss it with his fellow workmen. To the best of his belief the other three men (whose names he would not divulge), employed with him on the work took the same oath. That was all that he could be made to say.

But the confirmation of my theory that a secret did exist in the construction acted like a tonic to our endeavors, and Milbrath asked whether he should come on and order the wing torn down.

I read this letter as I jogged slowly homeward. I was digesting its contents mentally as I turned into the main approach to Overlook. The day was

unusually clear, and the villa stood out in relief against the verdant background.

All at once I became conscious of something strange in the appearance of the south wing. It was only a trifle, in itself insignificant and without interest, but to me at that moment it was the most remarkable thing that I had observed about the place — so remarkable, indeed, that I marveled, and marvel yet, that it should have escaped my attention for so long. *The chimney into which the fireplace opened at the south end of the library set back fully four feet from the end of the building at the roof, showing that a space that I had not accounted for lay in the wing to the south of the library!*

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SECRET OF THE WING

AS I strode into the house Gaspard was busy with the last touches to the midday meal, but with military precision he responded to my call to join me in the library.

"A yardstick or a tape measure," I cried. "Is there one about?"

"Oui, m'sieu," and in a few minutes Gaspard produced a measure.

"Now, the length of this room," I said, and stretched the bit of tape across it.

Allowing for the width of the bookcases, the room lay thirty feet and three inches to the north and south. The outside wall of the wing measured precisely thirty-eight feet three and one-half inches in the same direction. Counting out the width of the entry between the library and the parlor, four feet and two inches were still unaccounted for on the inside.

Gaspard regarded me with ill-contained excitement, and a smothered exclamation as this truth was proved to us, and my answer was to make a careful examination of the outside walls in search of a hidden door. But not only were the walls to every appearance and sound of solid masonry, but the trailing woodbine upon them was undisturbed,

and the fern beds at the foundation were untrampled. It was clear that I must look on the inside for the entrance to the secret chamber.

I set myself to considering how light and air were furnished to it. There were no windows or ventilators, so far as could be seen from the lawn or from below on the roadway; but that curious, vine-hung parapet rail surrounding the cornice might hide either. Then I recalled that the two rooms on the second floor above the parlors were lighted alone by end windows. We had not used these rooms, but I marveled when I first saw them that so valuable a light as that from the south should be shut out by blank wall space. Now the fact bore new significance for me: for without doubt the roof of the wing contained evidences of a hidden room, against the discovery of which the comfort of the two chambers had counted as nothing to the mind of Peter Somhers.

To the roof of the wing I must get, therefore, and Gaspard went in search of a ladder. He was obliged to call upon Horsford before he secured one, but the result was worth his trouble: for when, at last, I found myself above the parapet rail my surmises were proved.

Lying close to the cornice, and below it, was a shaft about ten inches in diameter. I moved the ladder so as to get my face close to one of the openings of the cap, but all that I could see was a glimmer below, like light upon water, or upon a mirror. But the entrance to the secret room? The logical conclusion was that it was from the library, but

unless those staid bookcases had given us the lie when we cleaned about them, they were immovable — a part of the very walls behind them. Was an entrance from the outside by means of an underground passage illogical? Those grottos at the sunken gardens would make ideal entrances to subterranean mysteries. Then I recalled that once I had approached them, full, myself, of a spirit of romance, only to find that their fascinating appearance ended with the hanging vines around them.

I felt impelled to visit them again, nevertheless, and my eyes, traveling the distance from one and then the other of the grottos, and back again to the wing, quickly decided me that the secret of entrance to the wing must lie, if in either, in the larger one.

As on my previous visit, the grotto disappointed me with its uncompromising wall of stone behind the vines which now had begun to display here and there bunches of reddening berries amid the green. But what was that shining between the stones half-way up the wall at my left? A bit of metal, for all the world, so small as almost to defy detection! Under any other conditions probably I should have thought it only a bit that by chance had been mixed in the mortar. But now — In an instant my hand was upon it, and though it failed to respond to my touch and reveal an opening I could not doubt that it connected with a spring lock, and that I stood before a secret door, in all probability the one that I sought.

By every art that I knew I endeavored to coax the spring to answer to my manipulations of the

bit of steel, but without success, and Gaspard, who had followed me with the ladder, spent not only his patience but a fine assortment of French imprecations upon it — and all in vain.

There was yet one more hope left for getting at the secret room.

“Gaspard,” I said, “I’m going to wire Mr. Milbrath to join me immediately, and I want you to take the telegram over to Winton; but first we’ll have one more try at this puzzle. Do you suppose that if we unloaded the bookcases at the sides of the fireplace in the library we could move them?”

Gaspard shook his head doubtfully.

“Well, so I supposed, but let us prove it.”

“Certainement, m’sieu.”

We returned to the library, and Gaspard began to remove the volumes from the shelves to the west of the fireplace, while I unloaded the shelves at the east.

Very quickly we came upon a difference. The shelves on which I was at work were backed by walnut boards like themselves, instead of by the plastered wall, as elsewhere in the room. It required but a moment’s thought to explain the reason for the difference. The wooden back hid the secret door! These shelves, then, must move; but even with the last book out they would not budge. We examined their surface inch by inch for a fastening, but not a sign of one could we find. It was plain that these cases swung into the room upon strong hinges, and that the lock was on the other side. The

only way to get beyond, therefore, was to tear down the woodwork nearest us. This I disliked to do unless Milbrath were present. I therefore abandoned the investigation for the time, and Gaspard cantered into Winton with the telegram.

I had wired Milbrath to come, if possible, on the six forty-five from Boston; and long before that train was due in Beverly I was driving stationward. Inactivity at that time was out of the question for me, and I felt that I could not sleep until I knew the secret of the hidden room.

During the afternoon I had tried to pass the time in a call at Red Gables, but found that Dolly had gone to Providence to shop with Mrs. Foster for a few days, and that Mr. McClure was out for a drive in the canopy-covered phaeton.

For a time, therefore, I rowed on the bay, but even that exercise failed to steady my pulse, and from then until I made a start for Beverly, I vibrated like a restless schoolgirl between the dismantled shelves in the library and the secret door in the grotto, which, as the evening came on, was flooded with the uncertain light from a waning moon.

I was conscious of relief when Milbrath stepped from the train. He handed to me a letter as he greeted me, and I saw that it was from Mr. Summerfield. I tore it open under the light from the station lamp, and read aloud:

MR. BLISS, Parker House,

DEAR YOUNG MAN: Your recent letter is entertaining — to say the least. You appear to have forgotten

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that you are under contract to work for me, within specifications, for one year, and a signed contract is not a thing to be set aside for a whim.

I can explain my connection with the late Peter Somhers to your entire satisfaction — when I choose, and very likely I shall do so — some time. In the meantime go ahead with your twopenny h'penny investigations and forget that you are sometimes a fool.

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

“Well, for coolness and insolence that takes the prize!” exclaimed Milbrath. “Not a word, either, about his visit down here. The old fellow *must* be daffy. But if he won't meet you, we'll contrive to meet him. The cabby who got him away from me the other day called upon us to-day.”

“And you learned where he set old Summerfield down?”

“He told me that it was on Concord Street at a furnished-room house. He could not recall the number but he said that he could take me to the place.”

“Yes?”

“That was just as your message came, so I had no time to go with him. But I took his number and told him that I would look him up at his stand in a day or two. What has happened down here?”

We were in the carriage by this time, and had turned into the highroad.

“I have found the secret of the wing, I suppose.”

“Is it — a room?”

“I dare say it is, though as yet I've not got

inside," and I briefly related my experiences of the afternoon.

Milbrath listened with widening eyes.

"By George!" he cried when I had finished. "What a blind ass I am. Why, I might have known there was a secret way out of the library, but it never seemed reasonable to me until this moment — even when you suggested the possibility the other day. Now I remember that uncle used to have a habit of appearing in and disappearing from that room like a magician. I recall one instance in particular. It was during the last summer of his life, and we were discussing, quite amicably, for a wonder, some subject that required reference to a book that lay on a parlor table. I stepped out to get it, and when I returned, an instant later, uncle had disappeared. I looked about in amazement, for, so far as I knew, the only way that he could have left the room was through the windows, which were closed, or through the door on the entry portico. I stepped back to that door, only to find it locked and bolted, and at that moment Uncle Peter's tantalizing laugh rang out in the library, and I found him there in his chair by the fireplace almost doubled with laughter.

"'Oh, you're a keen-eyed, sharp-witted youth!' he cried catching his breath, 'a credit to your family and your 'varsity, to be sure. Your wit will never save your neck.'

"I remember his very words, you see."

"Well, he had his laugh in those days; we shall have ours now — perhaps; but the first thing that

we want to learn is the purpose of the place to which it leads. Do you feel equal to going ahead to-night?"

"I'm for that before anything else. There's Gaspard yonder now, and Gaspard has a light burning for you."

We hurried the horses on, and at the door of the house left them panting and glad to rest, as we proceeded to the library.

Gaspard had lighted the three lamps in the chandelier and the reading-lamp with the green shade, so that the room was brilliant. The dismantled shelves with volumes heaped upon the floor gave the apartment an appearance of disorder very different from the neatness that had prevailed in it upon my first entrance.

"How blind we are to the simplest facts," I remarked. "Those brushed-away footprints, for instance, leading to this bookcase. And I supposed that the intruder had come this way for a volume!"

Gaspard had provided a sledge and an axe, and without further ado, we began relentlessly to break down the beautiful bookshelves. It was a longer and a warmer task than we had counted upon, but it was done at last, and standing in the chips that bestrewed the floor, we saw that the bolt which had held the case to the wall was followed by another which fastened from the side away from us the door now clearly outlined in the plastered wall.

It was but a wooden door, only as high as the bookcase had been, and a single blow from the sledge sent a million shivers from it into the air.

Another well-aimed blow from the strong arm of Milbrath unloosened the catch and like a flash, and noiselessly, what was left of the little door rolled back and disclosed the place beyond.

I seized the reading-lamp and doffed its shade. Its glow, spreading ahead, lighted up the recess and showed us a space scarcely larger than a closet—four feet wide and only ten feet long.

Across the east end, which was to the left of the entrance, stood a roll-top desk similar to the one in the library, its cover but halfway down.

An immense mirror, apparently sunk in the plaster, stretched above a leather couch on the south wall, and at the foot of the couch was a marble set bowl with faucets for running water.

On the west wall was a door, no doubt the one leading into the subterranean passage, and on the other side of that, in the corner, stood a table bearing a chafing dish. A cupboard above contained cocoa, crackers and sugar, all fresh. A curious collection for this silent room.

“Shall I break in this door also?” asked Milbrath indicating the one on the west wall. “You see it is locked and from the outside apparently, as the key is missing.”

“Wait a bit,” I answered. “Let us first see whether the desk yields a clue. That, I suppose, is the door that leads to the grotto.”

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME STARTLING DOCUMENTS

THE desk was naturally the first thing to which we turned. Above it hung a large picture which had attracted my attention almost as quickly as the expanse of mirror when I stepped into the room. It was an oil painting as wide as the desk, and fully five feet high in its massive gilt frame. It showed a park, with the tessellated turrets of a medieval-looking palace silhouetted against an evening sky. The background was a ruddy stretch of sunset horizon, and the rose-tinted twilight seemed to filter through the gaunt leafless trees that rose bleak and stark in the foreground. Around the trunk of one of the larger trees a man peered — a man with a handsome, well-bred face, a high white forehead and a Vandyke beard. Then one saw that through the well-cared-for hair on his hatless head two tiny horns rose up, and that the nails on the fingers of the shapely hand that clung to the trunk of the tree were curved and claw-like. The lips of this man were parted. Was it in a smile?

Remarkable as was the conception, the execution was little short of marvelous; for looking from one side of the picture one saw a smile, sardonic, cruel, bitter, on those parted lips. From the other side, the mouth showed a wistful pity as the man

looked down upon a gruesome, grinning skeleton before him.

Above the picture a point of light high up indicated the ventilating shaft. Below was a picture in a walnut frame with its face to the wall. I turned it carefully, and as I did so Milbrath uttered an exclamation of surprise. It was a water-color likeness of the little boy who had died in youth, and once it had hung above the rolltop desk in the library. Had something been done in this room that Peter Somhers could not do, or see done, with the merry, candid eyes of his loved, lost son upon him? Surely it would be illogical to speculate that anyone but Peter Somhers would turn that face to the wall — unless, indeed, this child were somehow connected with the secret of Peter Somhers' association with Philander Summerfield.

"Will you examine the desk?" I asked.

Milbrath shook his head.

"If you are willing to do it I will not," he answered.

I took my seat in the swivel chair before the desk, the only chair in the room, and Milbrath seated himself on the couch close by me.

At a touch the half-raised top of the desk rolled swiftly into its place, and a blue blotter, literally covered with prints, lay before us. At the back of it stood an ink-well — a deer's head with branching horns on which lay three pens in holders. One after another I picked them up and examined them. Two of them were old and rusty and showed long disuse. The third was comparatively new.

The ink was a writing fluid, such as had been used on two of the warnings that I had received; and on one side of the desk were half a dozen sheets of lined foolscap paper of the kind used by my anonymous warner.

The pigeon-holes were empty, save for a bottle of mucilage, a ball of twine, and a paper of pins.

To the left of the blotter was a year reference calendar for that year, and I observed with interest that the date uppermost was September 1st — the previous day — when Philander Summerfield had persisted in inquiring for me at the doors of Overlook.

Gaspard's assertion that the old man after each inquiry had gone to the garden and presently had disappeared, suddenly assumed a new significance. He had waited until he believed Gaspard had ceased to watch him and had slipped through the grotto entrance into the subterranean passage and thence to this room.

I did not pause to acquaint Milbrath with this revelation, but, having seen all there was to be seen on the desk, I opened one of the drawers.

It contained only a pack of playing cards in the pasteboard case in which they were purchased. They showed considerable use, some of them being bent at the corners, and all of them were soiled.

"Were these Mr. Somhers' or are they the property of Philander Summerfield?" I asked Milbrath.

"Uncle enjoyed cards," he answered. "Solitaire was a great game with him. Often he'd play one game or another far into the night."

The second drawer held only a reading glass with a lens remarkable for its strength. The third drawer was as deep as the other two together, and was divided lengthwise through the centre. On one side was a pair of bright-hued "carpet slippers" at sight of which Milbrath uttered the single word: "Uncle's!"

I returned the slippers to their place in the drawer, and picked up a pair of boots with square toes!

"Ah!" I cried. "We've solved one mystery, at least. These are proof that my anonymous friend had access to this room. Now, what is this?" My foot had come in contact with something under the desk. Peering under I perceived the tin cover of a typewriter.

"How kind of him to leave it! Or did Mr. Sombers have a typewriter?"

"I never saw one here, but I'm beginning to think that fact counts for nothing. Jove! What was uncle's idea in having all this, anyway?"

"We'll go on and see if our search can tell us. *Some time* I want to compare the print that machine makes with that of the notes I've received."

I turned to the left side of the desk, where there were four drawers.

The first was crammed to the very top with bundles of letters. These were divided into two packages, and under the binding string of each was a slip of paper. On one slip, in Mr. Sombers' upright chirography, was inscribed: "From Adelaide;" on the other the words were: "To Adelaide."

"His wife," explained Milbrath. "He was deeply attached to her and was never the same after her death."

The second drawer contained photographs. We looked them over hastily and Milbrath told me who the originals were.

There were several of Mrs. Somhers — a calm-looking, sweet-faced woman — and a full dozen of the boy, in every pose and expression. There were pictures of Francis, the brother, at various ages, of the sister who had been Harrison Milbrath's mother, and daguerreotypes of a generation back. Last of all was a collection of photographs of Mr. Somhers himself.

One taken in his boyhood showed him to have been a chubby-faced, bright-eyed lad; another, a stripling in his early teens; yet another, in his first mustache presumably, from the shadow on the upper lip. Another showed him with the laughing boy upon his shoulder, and it was the picture of a proud and happy father.

And so the pictures ran, showing a gradual advance in age.

"He would never sit for his picture after Aunt Adelaide's death," Milbrath remarked. But in that he was mistaken, for almost directly I came upon an envelope containing two photographs. At first glance they appeared identical — prints from one negative. But a closer inspection proved such a conclusion wrong. Were they, indeed, of the same man? I seized the lens and examined each photograph with minute care.

"Do you see any difference in them?" I asked, handing the pictures to Milbrath, who had been looking over my shoulder silently as I studied.

"There is a difference. It is — are they both of Uncle Peter?"

"That is what I have been wondering. Study them for a moment under the glass. The dress is the same, you see. Observe the pose. Identical. The mustache and the hair. Cut in the same way, you will notice. The noses would be difficult to distinguish if covers were placed over the remainder of the faces. The shape of the heads is similar, the turn of the eyebrows also, but ——"

"The eyes."

"That's it! The expression of the eyes. Now, which resembles Mr. Somhers?"

"This."

"Did you ever see him like this other?"

"Never. Possibly in his younger days uncle's eyelids may have drooped in that gentle way, but I doubt it. Let us look back to the photographs that we have just seen."

We turned to the earlier pictures and studied them carefully, but not in one did we find the mild-tempered droop that characterized the eyelids of the second photograph.

"There's material here for an interesting study," I observed as I replaced the two photographs in their envelope and laid the lens upon them. "Apparently we have stumbled upon some new evidence, and when we are through we'll try to classify it. Hello! What's in this drawer? Receipts, by Jove, and of

more than momentary interest, too, as they are for large amounts. No local tradesman's bills, these, I'll be bound. See, they are in careful chronological order, and run back a quarter of a century, or more." And wondering I turned to the year 18—. There it was, as I hoped, a receipt for a tombstone placed over the grave of Francis Somhers. Following it was a large collection of receipted bills for debts contracted by Francis Somhers and paid by Peter Somhers. At the bottom of the last of these was scrawled in capitals one word: "FINIS."

"That looks as though Mr. Somhers had reached the end of an unwelcome task," I commented. "Still you never can tell. If Francis Somhers were alive and his brother had reasons for wishing him considered dead I suppose he would have taken the same precautions. However, let us see what is in here."

The fourth drawer contained an unlabeled letter file, which looked comparatively new, and had but few papers in it. Evidently it had not been long used.

The first letters of the alphabet carried nothing between their leaves, "N" being the first letter under which a filing was made. It proved to be a notification from "A. Norcross, Sixth Avenue, New York," to the effect that a man answering to requirements left by Mr. Somhers had appeared and would return on May 22d, 1892 (which was five months before Mr. Somhers' decease), at which time Mr. Somhers could see the man at Mr. Norcross' place.

At the moment this had no significance to us. Its only importance to our eyes then was that it was one of few letters apparently deemed by Mr. Somhers of sufficient value or interest to preserve.

The letter "S," the only other letter under which filing appeared, proved rich in material for there were three letters from Philander Summerfield!

We observed the dates and read them in the order of their writing. I have them before me as I pen these words, and will give them verbatim:

New York,

MR. PETER SOMHERS, Winton,

DEAR SIR: If you will meet me at a time and place that you will please name, I shall be able to give you a report of the first experiment, which, I think, will prove entirely satisfactory to you.

Deferring to your request that I present my reports verbally, rather than on paper, I may say only that as T. B. S. appeared to be under complete delusion as to my real identity the necessity of a speedy conference with you will be apparent to you.

Respectfully yours,

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Milbrath sternly, taking the letter from my hand. "This gives the impression that uncle was involved in some shady transaction. I can hardly credit that. What have the other letters to say?"

New York,

MR. PETER SOMHERS, Winton,

DEAR SIR: I have considered your second proposal, and after due consideration am prepared to accept the

conditions and the remuneration you offered. Kindly appoint a time and place where we may confer as to the necessary details,

Respectfully yours,

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

"The other," said Milbrath tersely, with knit brows.

The third letter, like the two that preceded it, was signed by Philander Summerfield, and began in the same formal way.

"As per your instructions," it ran, "I will arrive in Beverly on Thursday, October 12th ——"

"Good heavens!" interrupted Milbrath, "the day of the murder! Summerfield is our man then!"

"This seems proof. Let me read on:"

I will arrive as on the former occasion and will enter by the private way.

"And now for this last paper," I said, opening a folded sheet. "Whew! It looks like a contract. And it is one, by Jingo! Now we shall know, perhaps, what the old fellows were up to!"

Milbrath leaned eagerly over my shoulder as I read aloud:

Beginning on this day, Thursday, October 12th, 1892, I, Philander Summerfield, formerly, and to date residing at —— Street, New York City, in consideration of sums of money previously paid by check and in consideration of the further payment at the end of twelve months of twenty thousand dollars by Peter Somhers, of Winton, State of ——, do agree



“ ‘And now for this last paper,’ I said, opening a folded sheet.”

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to impersonate said Peter Somhers to the best of my knowledge and ability appearing to be him during the next twelve months.

Signed

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

Pinned to this remarkable document was a sheet of paper similar in size and written by the same hand, unquestionably by Mr. Somhers:

I, Peter Somhers, of the town of Winton, State of _____, do hereby agree to pay to Philander Summerfield, formerly, and to date, residing at _____ Street, New York City, the sum of twenty thousand dollars, over and above thirty thousand dollars already paid by me in check, for a faithful impersonation of me during one year, or for such a portion of one year as I see fit to demand the masquerade. Said twenty thousand dollars to be paid immediately upon the release of Philander Summerfield from this contract.

Signed

PETER SOMHERS.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A THRILLING ESCAPE

"THIS is the last straw!" cried Milbrath, taking up the extraordinary documents and staring at them in a dazed sort of way. "What, in heaven's name, does it all mean? Was Uncle Peter crazy?"

"It begins to look so," I assented dryly. "Or deep-dyed. It means, also, that this second photograph is without doubt of Philander Summerfield," and I tapped the envelope containing the pictures. "It shows us again what a change in a man's face a beard will make."

"But his purpose?" persisted Milbrath. "If we find this Summerfield and bring him to justice, are we to drag uncle's name into the mud?"

"That is of course, a question for the future. Perhaps we can avoid it. Jingo! It's past midnight. Well, I'm for bed, with your permission. Gaspard has arranged for you to take the room next to me — your old room, I believe. To-morrow we'll get at this puzzle again. In the sunlight we shall be able to do as much again, and to think twice as clearly."

Milbrath rose reluctantly, and we ascended the stairs in silence. Gaspard had long since preceded us, and we could hear the mechanical regularity of his sonorous comfort in a distant room.

At the door of his room Milbrath hesitated.

"We have found evidence, yet it is n't proof," he said as if speaking to himself. "What need had Uncle Peter for a masquerader? I dare say we'll find that we are off the track now; that the papers were a joke." He spoke eagerly and as if anxious that I should agree with him, but without conviction.

"Nothing is impossible, as you remarked a week ago," I observed. "But we've gained one point that we must not overlook. Philander Summerfield was with Mr. Somhers on that fateful twelfth of October."

Milbrath nodded.

"And now it's up to us to get at this Summerfield and hear what he has to say for himself," he said.

Milbrath was already astir when I went down-stairs in the morning, and I found him in the little room.

"Until I came here I could not believe that I had not had the nightmare," he said, as I entered. He held the contracts in his hand as he spoke.

"Better leave it all until after breakfast," I advised.

Half an hour later we rose from the breakfast table and with one accord moved toward the library. As we entered the room a muffled exclamation came from the direction of the secret chamber, followed immediately by the soft, quick closing of a door.

Like a flash came the thought that we had surprised Philander Summerfield, and that he had fled through the underground passage. I glanced at Milbrath and saw that he was of the same opinion.

"Run to the grotto," I cried, "and head him off. I will follow him somehow and meet you!"

In a trice Milbrath had acted upon my suggestion, and calling at the top of my voice for Gaspard, I seized a candle from one of the candelabra upon the bookcases and had it lighted just as Gaspard came running in, his eyes starting from his head.

"You call, m'sieu?"

"Yes; I want your help instantly."

I fully expected to find the door which led from the little room locked, and it was, indeed, fastened against us.

Gaspard gazed about him in mute surprise, for I did not give him an opportunity to express himself.

"Our shoulders to this door, Gaspard. Heavens! Why did we take away the sledge and the axe? The man we want is behind it. Now! One, two, three——"

Bang!

Gaspard's lithe and muscular body with my heavier one crashed against the paneling. There was a sound of deep cracking, but the wood did not splinter. These were good doors, surely, that Peter Somhers had selected to guard his hidden chamber!

Again with one impulse we threw ourselves upon the casement. That time there was a tremendous crash of splintering wood and I was conscious of rolling over and over, bump after bump, down some stairs. Later I found that it was a very short and shallow flight, but at the moment the length seemed

interminable. Gaspard followed the same course, and landed on top of me with a volley of French oaths.

We were upon our feet immediately, a trifle stunned, perhaps, but with enough reason left to act quickly, and in a trice Gaspard relighted the sputtering candle and put it in my hand.

"Come," I said under my breath. "Follow me and have your eyes open."

Ahead I could see only darkness, at the sides but the rough stones and crumbling mortar of the passage. So narrow was it that we walked in single file. An odor of earth-mould filled our nostrils, and I found myself fancying what a heavy rain might do for this subterranean corridor.

After a few yards an abrupt bend brought us to a glimpse of day not more than twenty feet ahead.

I ran forward swiftly. But Gaspard and I were alone in the tunnel, and at its end, which was, indeed, the grotto entrance wide open now, stood Milbrath — alone.

"The old fellow must be the very devil," Milbrath cried. "I came from you at top speed, but when I reached here this entrance was as you see it, and no mark or sound indicated the course he had taken."

In my disappointment I felt for the first time the bruises I had suffered in my flight down the steps and I looked down, ruefully enough, I suppose, at my torn and dusty clothes. And, notwithstanding the tensivity of his feelings at the moment, Milbrath laughed.

"It appears that you have suffered something besides defeat," he said, "I hope you are not injured?"

"This is nothing — but losing him! How in the name of Jupiter could he get away? Has he wings?"

We examined the turf and the gravel about the grotto, but there was no trace there of the fugitive.

"We know that he is somewhere in the vicinity," I said. "Here, Gaspard! Get the bell you have used to call me when I'm not in sight. Go yonder to the highest point of land on the place, and if you see a man not Mr. Milbrath or me ring the bell. Do you comprehend?"

"Oui, m'sieu."

"Then be quick!"

So literally did Gaspard interpret my instructions that he was on sentinel duty by the time Milbrath and I had resolved on our simple plan for action.

Milbrath went in one direction, looking for the man or for some sign that he had passed that way, while I moved toward another point. Between us we scoured the grounds and met again at the grotto door — without news.

"There's a train for Boston at ten-two. Shall I go over to Beverly and be on the lookout for the old fellow to take it?" Milbrath asked.

"That is a good idea. And wire to the Pingree Agency to have every train that passes through here watched until further notice at the Park Square Station. That ought to get him."

"If he is Summerfield, and from New York ——?"

"The south bound trains must be watched, that is true. I'll take temporary board at the Winton station, and we can keep each other informed by wire. I'll order the horses at once."

Milbrath looked amused.

"Would n't you feel more comfortable in a different suit?" he inquired, eying my split trouser legs and dust-grimed coat. "Let me give directions this time."

In the excitement of the moment I had forgotten my appearance and my aching joints.

"Yes," I said. "Order whichever horse you prefer for yourself and I'll take the other one. Now, watch *me* disappear!"

CHAPTER XXIX

SUMMERFIELD'S PAST

FROM the Beverly station Milbrath sent me this succinct message:

Eleven A. M. Nothing doing.

Later he telegraphed that he had decided to go on to Boston to see how things were progressing at that end of the line.

For my part I scanned closely each of the few individuals who boarded the trains that left Winton during the twenty-four hours that followed, and I felt confident that Mr. Summerfield was not of them. As Milbrath communicated, late on the second day, that the old fellow had not yet arrived in Boston, the inference was that he was still in the vicinity of Overlook.

Hutton grew curious because of my frequent visits to his station, and I confided to him that I was on the lookout for the peculiar old man who had excited his interest. I dare say he gathered a bit more by his shrewd cross-examining to this admission, but he was far from suspecting the whole truth, and I gained his support, for he promised to inform me immediately whenever Mr. Summerfield appeared at the Winton station again.

This, however, was not until the afternoon following Milbrath's departure. By that time I had

come to feel that important as it might be to get Mr. Summerfield, his capture just then was scarcely more important than information about him and his past with which to confront and, if need be, force him to a confession of the truth when we laid hands on him.

I had carefully examined the walls of the underground passage with a view to finding a way by which Summerfield had eluded us with such apparent ease, but they were of stone and earth and mortar, without opening of any kind save at the ends, and I was forced to believe that he had escaped solely through the aid of his swift feet — a possibility seemingly incredible in one of his age.

The contracts, the telltale letters, and the two photographs, so like and yet so unlike, I had taken the precaution to fasten securely in one of my pockets before I left Overlook, and when I had concluded my arrangements with Hutton I drove homeward with a new plan for action.

"Gaspard," I announced, "I am going to New York on the evening train. Be prepared to go with me."

"Oui, m'sieu." Gaspard's face grew long, nevertheless. He hesitated, and then asked:

"Iss it for all zee time, m'sieu?"

I restrained a smile. The anxiety expressed by Gaspard's plastic features could denote but one thing: distress at leaving Delia, the fresh-cheeked young Receiver of the Hairpin, before whom Gaspard was wearing off the skin on his middle-aged knees.

"Probably not," I answered, "I may be gone only a few days."

"Ah! m'sieu." Gaspard's face glowed again. "Possibly, zen, m'sieu vould not care zat I remain ici?"

"Gaspard," I said, with grave pretense at sternness. "It is of Delia that you think, not of me."

"Non! non! m'sieu. Non! Eet is of m'sieu always — virst," protested Gaspard, an embodiment of gesticulation. "Mais zee petite Delia. Ah! to leave her now!"

I considered. I did not need to have Gaspard with me. So little need would I have of him, indeed, that I could but send him about his own business as soon as we reached the city; but if I left him alone at Overlook was it not possible that Summerfield, still in the vicinity, might burn the house in the hope of destroying the papers which he must assume were discovered? And as night would be the logical time for him to do the deed, might it not be while the invincible — and unawakable — Gaspard slept?

On the other hand, if I left Overlook deserted, the place offered a safe refuge for Summerfield, who, doubtless, would soon discover that it was vacated.

"If I leave you, Gaspard," I said, "you must go to the cottage to sleep. Are you willing to do that?"

Gaspard's expression said plainly that he was *not* willing, but he answered:

"If m'sieu désire — mais ——"

"Very well. I'll speak to Mrs. Horsford about preparing a bed for you. And you must keep your word," I added sternly. "Your 'Beel-ze-bub' is around and he may burn the house while you sleep. You know how you do sleep!"

Gaspard shrugged his shoulders in a manner which committed Beelzebub and all fear of him to the eternal bow-wows, as he rode off with a telegram to Milbrath asking him to join me that evening, if possible, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York.

Then I proceeded to the stables where Horsford was tossing hay. Horsford had not forgotten his gratitude to me. His wife, for nearly two weeks free from the influence of her sister, had, to all appearances, settled down to a quiet contentment with her Joe and her child, and Horsford's faith that the condition would last was unbounded. His appreciation of the part I had played in his domestic affairs was shown in a hundred small ways, and he had endeavored to learn something about La Cour for me. It was concerning this matter that I went to the stable.

"Any news?" I asked.

"Not exactly, sir, but there's something 'anging in the hair that may mean aught to you. I was at Jim's 'ouse this noon, sir, to get the money 'e should 'ave paid me before now hon the gray mare. You know the one, sir. 'E took 'er hof me a month back and said 'e would pay hat once — which 'e 'as never done. I must 'ave the money to-morrow or the roan colt, which I got in place hof Grayskin, will go back to Jenkins. Hand so I told Jim.

“ ‘Go t’ell!’ — them was ’is words, sir — ‘You ’ll ’ave the money when I can get hit.’

“ ‘When ’ll that be?’ I arks.

“ ‘Maybe to-morrow; maybe sooner. *I ’ll ’ave it, any’ow, hor somebody goes t’ jail — somebody not far away from ’ere just now, neither,’ an’ Jim looks hoff with a wink toward the front room where, I took hit, there ware somebody to ’ear.’*

My impulse was to find a pretext to visit Arms at once and investigate the grounds for Horsford’s suspicion, for if it were not La Cour who was to furnish Jim with money or go to jail, who was it? I wanted to know. But a glance at my watch showed me that I should have barely time to prepare for my trip and get to the station, if I were to reach town that night. So, with a commission to Horsford to ascertain all that he could in my interest, I hurried back to the house.

Because of a wrecked freight train near Hartford I reached the Grand Central two hours behind scheduled time, and Milbrath was installed in his room at the hotel when I arrived there. His mobile face showed added lines of anxiety, and from the occasional quiver of his eyelids, it was obvious that he was keyed to a high pitch.

“ ‘We ’ve got to settle this business somehow, or you ’ll be on your back,’ I remarked after a moment or two of commonplaces.

“ ‘Oh, I shall be all right in the morning,’ he answered with a faint smile. “ ‘Now tell me what headway you have made to-day.’”

“ ‘None, absolutely none,’ and I recounted my

movements of the past twenty-four hours. "And you?" I queried in conclusion. "Perhaps you have more to relate?"

Milbrath shook his head.

"I drove to the house in Concord Street where Mr. Summerfield went the day I chased him. He had roomed there, the landlady said, but he had given up his room (telling her that he was leaving town) last Thursday — the very day, you see, that I saw him."

"He has been in Winton so recently, do you suppose he has a hiding-place there?"

"It looks like that. Then arises the question of where?"

"God alone knows," I answered. But as the words passed my lips an idea leaped into my brain and kept me silent with rapid thought, staring before me until Milbrath's voice roused me.

"You look as if you were seeing a ghost," he said with a short laugh, following the direction of my gaze.

"Some ideas are ghosts, I believe," I returned, answering his laugh. "What were we saying? Ah yes! Did you communicate with the men who are watching the doctor's house?"

"No, for I do not believe that he has left Boston permanently. The knowledge that we are on his track may prove a little wearing on his nerves, in which case he may have need to visit the doctor again."

"If he has n't got wind of our visit there."

"True. At all events I said nothing to the de-

tectives. Instead I ordered another to watch the post office for him. I endeavored, through a ruse, to learn whether Summerfield had ordered his mail forwarded somewhere, but I got nothing there, of course. I hope that we shall have better success tomorrow."

And we did have.

The men's lodging house in —— Street where Philander Summerfield had once roomed was easily found. It was of the plainest and shabbiest type of that order of house. Mr. Grayson, the manager, had no difficulty in recalling Philander Summerfield, and was ready enough to talk about him.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I remember old 'P. S.' of course I do. I had an experience with him I don't have with every lodger. Fine man, too, was he."

"What became of him when he left your place?" I asked.

"Why, I believe he went away to join a brother who had money. He came here once — the brother — as much like 'P. S.' as you could well fancy brothers to be."

"You have no recollection, I suppose, where this brother lived?"

"I never knew. I dare say I should never have thought twice about him except that when 'P. S.' first came here he tried to kill himself — shut up his room and turned on the gas — you know the way. As it happened I passed the door of his room about that time and after knocking several times and getting no answer why, I just broke in the door. He was unconscious, but I contrived to bring

him to without calling in help or letting anybody know what had been going on. I meant, nevertheless, to hand him over to the police. But when he was himself again and knew what had happened and what I meant to do he begged like a thief for me to spare him that disgrace. He told me then that he was without a living relative, had come to the end of his resources, could not find work, and was too proud to beg, yet he could n't endure the publicity—even in this city where nobody knew him—of being brought before a magistrate as a pauper or for attempted self-destruction. He begged me to let him die and sink into a nameless grave.

“I told him, even if he was old enough, most, to be my father, that if he'd perk up and act like a man, I'd give him his food and a bed for what he could do to help me around here. Maybe then, after a while, he'd find a better job.

“That seemed to cheer him a bit, and he plodded around faithfully enough for almost two months. Then he begun to act queer—wonderfully sort of happy. Once he went out and was gone most of the day. When he come back he had on a new suit of clothes, hat, vest, everything new, even to his collar and cravat and of fine material, too. His eyes were shining and he looked like a different man.

“‘I've come across a streak of good luck, Grayson,' says he in kind of a jolly way for him. ‘Here's five dollars now on account, and pretty soon maybe I'll be able to pay you back, in a pecuniary way, at least, for all you've done for me.’

"Naturally I was curious and wanted to hear more, but no more would he tell. After that he would dress up in his new suit and go out quite often. Perhaps he'd be gone only for a few hours, perhaps it would be for a day or a day and a night. But he'd always come back with money in his trousers pocket which he'd chink gleefully and sometimes show me — happy as a boy with a new jackknife.

"Then one evening in walked a man and asked for Mr. Philander Summerfield, and for a minute I thought it was old 'P. S.' himself playing a joke on me.

"'G'wan!' says I. 'You can't fool me, Summerfield. I know you.'

"The man got red in the face — even his eyes got red and he stamped his foot and brought his fist down on my desk in a way that made me look to see if the inkwell had n't gone over. Then, suddenly, he laughed.

"'You're not to blame, I suppose, for thinking me Mr. Summerfield if we look so much alike, but you never saw me before. I'm his — brother.'

"Gol! You could have knocked me into a cocked hat with a feather. But I apologized as best I could and went to call 'P. S.'

"He came with me in those fine clothes of his, and the two old fellows, as alike as peas in a pod, went off in a corner of that room yonder and talked for a while in low tones. Then they went out together.

"Next day 'P. S.' come to me.

“ ‘Grayson,’ says he, ‘I’m going to leave you. I’ve got a good position at last that is going to make me a rich man, and I will not forget you; on that you may depend. You have done more for me than I can tell you.’

“ ‘Your brother has helped you?’ I asked.

“ ‘My brother?’ he said, kind of surprised.

“ ‘Why, yes; the man who came for you last night. He said he was your brother.’

“ ‘Oh, did he tell you that?’ said Summerfield. ‘Well, yes, I’m going with him.’

“ He went away then, never saying a word about money, but in a day or two a check for a hundred dollars come. That was more than he had any need to send me, but you can think what my surprise was when pretty soon along come a check for another hundred, then another and another, which made four hundred all together, with never an address so that I could send him a word of thanks. That ended it.”

“ Have you never seen him since then? ”

“ Never to this day. I’ve often wondered what had become of the old fellow, and why he wanted to keep back his relationship to that other man. You know he told me once that he hadn’t any relations. Had some trouble with them, I suppose.”

“ Did he never mention where his home had once been? ”

“ I don’t know as he ever did ” — thoughtfully — “ but once, when we were talking together — we used to be sort of crony-like together sometimes — he told me about teaching in a college in Virginia,

not such a great time before, I judged. That was as near as I ever got to knowing where he lived, I guess."

"How old a man was Mr. Summerfield then?"

"When he lived with me? Why, he said once he was something past fifty. Seemed to me he looked older, though I'm no judge of ages. Say, what are all these questions for, anyhow? Know old 'P. S.' do you?"

"We want to find him," I answered evasively. "Now here are two photographs. I wonder whether you will recognize them?"

I took from its envelope the picture Milbrath believed to be of his uncle.

"That's him!" Grayson exclaimed the instant he saw it. "A fine picture of him, too, only—well, there's something a little wrong when you come to look."

"This, then?" I said bringing forth the second photograph.

"That's him again. Looks more like him, too."

"Don't you think one of these pictures is of his brother?"

"Gol! I never thought of that," and Grayson took both photographs and scrutinized them carefully.

"Well, this is the brother, then," he said indicating the picture of Mr. Somhers.

"Why do you think so?"

"Can't tell you. I'm no artist. I know this is 'P. S.' though."

"One more question, Mr. Grayson, and then I

will detain you no longer. How long ago was it that Mr. Summerfield was here?"

"Just about the time you said — a little more than three years ago he came. It was the last of September, I know, when he went away."

We thanked Mr. Grayson and left with him a box of cigars that we had brought in case we found that he would use them, and got out of the house.

"I never expected such success as we've had to-day," I exclaimed when we were again upon the street. "Our next move must be to send an advertisement to the Richmond and Charlottesville, Virginia, papers."

And this is the message that I sent:

Wanted Immediately: Information concerning Philander Summerfield at the time of his residence in Virginia. \$100 reward. E. B., Parker House, Boston, Mass.

CHAPTER XXX

HORSFORD IN DURANCE

AS we left the telegraph office at Fifth Avenue and 23rd Street, I felt a touch upon my arm and turned about to find at my side a small man who looked up into my face with furtive eyes and a sly smile.

"Barney Rafferts, by all that's unholy!" I exclaimed. "Been shadowing *us*, Barney?"

"Not this time. It's a gory-hued divorce I'm on to-day," he laughed.

"Not this time?" Ah! By the way, Barney, you're just the man I've been wanting to see. What's the name of the old fellow who put you on my track six weeks or so ago?"

Barney shifted his eyes and showed his teeth with pleasant intention.

"Say, I think that's worth more'n an answer, don't you?"

"Maybe it is. How would this please you?" and I produced a ten-dollar bill.

Barney's eyes flashed greedily, but they had seen a companion to that bank note in my pocket, and he answered:

"That might quiet my sensitive conscience long enough for me to admit there was a man who had me look you up, but as to his name. Well, you see my mem'ry ain't first rate always."

"Perhaps this other bill will refresh your memory, you fox!"

"Just 's like 's not it will. Let 's see how they feel. Genuine, ain't they? See 'em disappear into my pocket — so? There! The old fellow's name, did you say? To tell the truth he did n't confide in me that far, but he was old and had gray hair — a beard ditto, and ——"

"If you don't know his name, how dare you take my money?" I roared in his ear.

"Now don't excite yourself," said Barney imperturbably. "I'll come to an interesting part presently. He did n't tell me his name, but I looked on the register at the Plaza when I went up to report, and he was down as — Summerfield, of Boston."

"And you followed me home that night! Well, all is fair in war, I suppose. How did you manage to get the note in the house the next day?"

"Easy! Just hid behind a vestibule door till somebody went in who did n't latch the door behind him. Great trick, that. Helloa! What's going on over there?"

We had reached our hotel by this time, and Barney's eyes indicated a gathering crowd across the square in the neighborhood of Irving Place.

"I'm off," he cried with a wave of his hand, and left us.

As we edged our way through the jostling crowd, I asked Milbrath what he thought about returning to Winton at once.

"Why not to Boston? I should suppose our chances were there."

"Well, I've got it into my head that Arms' 'La Cour' may be Summerfield. The fancy came last night when you asked me if I were seeing a ghost."

Milbrath's eyes widened.

"Jerusalem! That may be so. But you've seen that man, have n't you?"

"Never, unless he is the chap that Maggie carried the big hat to, you know."

"Did he resemble Summerfield? In size and figure, I mean."

"Why, I don't know. Perhaps so. I fancied he was younger, but very likely it was only fancy. But if La Cour is Summerfield, you can bank on it that Arms knows that he killed Mr. Somhers, and perhaps knows why."

"We'll admit the theory for sake of discussion," said Milbrath. "Do you think that Arms knew it at the time of my trials?"

"It's quite possible, and kept the truth to himself for a money consideration, to revenge himself on you, or for both reasons. Indeed, I'm not confident that he was not an accomplice in the crime, instead of merely an accessory after it. It's of no use for you to shake your head; he's involved somehow."

"Then we'll prove it. Have you a theory to explain Summerfield's visits to Winton?"

"No; there I'm stumped — unless they are to try to intimidate me with those foolish notes. And if he did n't want me to know the truth, why on earth did he offer me such inducements to discover it? The old gentleman must be just plain daffy."

By the way, have I told you that Arms has made a trail through the woods between Overlook and his cottage and that it joins yours on the other side?"

"No!" cried Milbrath with interest. "That is probably the way, then, that Summerfield went the other day! How did you learn about it?"

"From Horsford. By George! I believe that is the way Summerfield went. Idiot that I was not to think of it at the time!"

Milbrath pondered.

"If Summerfield resembles uncle," he said presently, "the fact may account for his apparent desire for seclusion when he is in Winton. Surely he could find excuses to explain his visits to you. By Jove! If he's been at Overlook this year without his beard, and looks like his picture, does n't that explain the ghost story the boys told?"

"Probably it does. Let's get back to Winton at once and call upon Arms. If Summerfield is not there we can have the cottage watched until he comes again."

We returned to the hotel for our bags, and found that a telegram awaited me there. I tore it open and read:

Come at once. Very important.

GASPARD.

"Now what is the meaning of that?" I exclaimed, handing the message to Milbrath. "It is an unequivocal command, and Gaspard is not a man to overstep his boundaries or to attach undue importance to a situation."

"Then I think we should make the next train."

We did "make it," but it cost us a hot race to the station, and our lunch.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when we reached Beverly. The thought of how we should get to Overlook did not occur to us until it was too late to wire Gaspard to meet us. After a tedious wait, therefore, while the one station carriage of Beverly carried an old lady up into a far distant portion of the town somewhere and returned for us, we made a start in a hired conveyance.

The driver was old, as deaf as an adder, and, apparently, as uncommunicative, and if we had hoped to engage him in gossip we soon found that we were to be disappointed.

As we passed the Arms cottage he did turn half around toward us as if to speak and one arm went out toward the house, but he looked back directly to his horses without having uttered a word.

We scrutinized the cottage curiously, wondering whether it had revealed a secret or gained one during our absence, but it looked from the outside much as I had always seen it — white and green and modest, its shades partly lowered like the eyelids of a fair coquette.

Gaspard was holding wide the screen door before our carriage stopped in front of the portico at Overlook. His face lacked the *débonair* smile that usually adorned it, and I knew at once that whatever his reason in sending for me it was not only urgent but serious.

"M'sieu has heard?" he asked, and when I told

him that I had heard nothing he cast a glance of such mingled incredulity, amazement and contempt at our driver as condemned the man at once to a perdition of unending stupidity.

"Of M'sieu Arms it iss. He iss of zee dead to-day — of zee murdered, m'sieu."

"Jim Arms murdered!" cried Milbrath. "When did it happen, man?"

"Zis mornin', m'sieu. And M'sieu Horsford, he iss in zee preeson."

"Horsford!" It was my turn to exclaim. "Do they say that Horsford did it?"

"Oui, m'sieu. He vas zee last at zee maison of M'sieu Arms. Now he vill not'ing zay but, 'I must speak vid Meester Bles.'"

I thought of the money that Arms had owed Horsford and wondered whether it could be that a row had arisen over the matter during which Arms had been killed. That Horsford had killed his cousin intentionally, I did not for a moment believe.

I looked at Milbrath.

"We 'll go over to him at once!" I said tentatively. "He is in the Beverly jail, I suppose, Gaspard?"

"Oui, m'sieu. Mais pardon, zee preeson is not longer open to vee-se-tors from seex o'clock, and it is now past seex, zirty minutes."

"I suppose we might bring influence to bear from some quarter and see him to-night," I remarked to Milbrath. "But it is late, and perhaps it would be as well first to hear what others have to say."

In this Milbrath agreed, and we encouraged Gas-

pard to tell us all that he knew about the tragedy. He told it with many words and gesticulations, frequent appeals to us for assistance with the English language, and with great dramatic fervor. But we knew little more when all was told (and gesticulated) than his first words had conveyed — that Arms was dead from a bullet that had entered his chest and touched his heart; that Horsford was alone with him at the time, and had been arrested, although he stoutly maintained his innocence of the crime and did not know who did it; and that he asked continually for me.

After a hasty supper Milbrath and I drove over to the Arms cottage. Milbrath declined to go inside.

"If I can aid you, of course you may call upon me. Otherwise I'll remain in the background. I fancy that my presence would not greatly comfort either of the women," he added with a touch of pathos.

I found Mrs. Arms in loud lamentation, but Maggie was silent and tearless, and her large black eyes never left the form of her mother, who rocked back and forth with her checked apron over her face, and wailed unceasingly for her "Jamie, her poor, murdered Jamie!"

"Tell 'im 'ow it wur, Maggie," she commanded at length, uncovering her face for a moment, "tell 'im."

Maggie hesitated. The color mounted slowly to her forehead and her eyes widened with a new expression of alarm. Then she began, dutifully, to speak, in a soft, monotonous voice:

"It was after the work was done up in the morning, and ma went down to the garden with me to 'elp pick blackberries for jam. We saw Joeie come in — and then, in a little while, 'e was on the porch yonder shouting for us to come up. But 'e did n't do it, sir," she interrupted herself to exclaim with increased alarm, "and you must n't believe 'e did."

"I don't believe he did," I answered, and my words appeared to have a wonderfully quieting effect on the girl. For the first time I saw her eyes rest upon me without apprehension.

"But Jamie was shot," she went on in a doubtful voice as if, having convinced me, she could yield to the doubt that harassed her, "shot and lyin' dead on the floor!"

She hid her face in her hands, and her mother, who had ceased to wail while the girl spoke, now broke forth again.

"Now, Mrs. Arms," I began resolutely as she paused to take breath. "I am here as a friend, and I mean to help you if I can. But I can do nothing unless you will dry your eyes and let me talk with you for a few minutes without interruption."

The checked apron came down after it had made a few effectual dabs at the old woman's face.

"Aye, sir," Mrs. Arms said, "I'll do as best I can."

"Please show me, then, just where Jim's body lay when you first saw him after the shooting."

"Aye, sir."

She led me into the kitchen, a large, uncarpeted

room, and pointed to a red spot on the white scoured floor.

"That, sir, is where 'e lay — 'is 'ead this way above the spot, the feet 'ere."

I studied the position of the spot in relation to the rest of the room. It was within two feet of a side wall — at a diverging line from which the body must have lain to bring the feet so well toward the center of the room.

"Was the room upset — as if there had been a struggle?" I asked.

"Hit was not, sir."

"There was one chair over, ma. This one, don't you remember?" and Maggie who had followed us into the kitchen touched a wooden-seated chair against the wall about three feet from the crimson spot.

"Is the chair now where it set when you went out to the garden yesterday?"

"Aye, sir. 'T is always there except at meals."

"Which way did the chair lie when you found it — on which side?"

Mrs. Arms looked puzzled, but Maggie did not hesitate.

"This way, sir, just so," and she tipped the chair over. The evidence, if the girl were right, was that the chair had fallen in the direction of the body.

"Was there no one here with Jim when you went to the garden?"

"No one, sir."

"How long was it after you went to the garden that you saw Horsford come in?"

"An 'alf hour, perhaps, sir," answered Maggie.

"Did either of you see the revolver that was fired?"

"Aye, sir. The coroner 'as it now."

"Did you recognize it?"

Both women shook their heads.

"Is there anything further that you can tell me?"

There seemed to be nothing, so I asked to see the clothing that Arms had worn.

The steps that I had taken, the questions I had asked up to that point were stereotyped and formal and had left me still sailing around without a rudder in this new sea of mystery. But as I put my hands upon the garments so recently worn by the late master (or tyrant) of the house in which I stood, I felt with a thrill that was wholly without logical excuse, that I had got hold of something that would yield a clue.

"Was he wearing a coat?" I inquired in some surprise, as I unfolded the brown tweed garment that lay on top.

"'E did 'ave it on when we found him," answered Maggie in a puzzled tone, "but not when we went out. The burn of the bullet is on it, sir."

I examined the coat carefully. The hole made by the bullet was an inch below the lapel on the left side; and it was evident that the assassin had stood to the left of his victim and close to him, for the tweed on that side of the hole was singed for a full quarter of an inch farther in that direction than around it. A curious feature was that the bullet must have passed upward.

The linings of most of the pockets, like the other linings of the garment, showed wear, and that on the left side was torn. Part of the tear appeared to be recent.

I puzzled over this evidence for several minutes, but gathered little or nothing from it. I passed on to the other garments, therefore, and examined each carefully, without, however, getting any new light.

Then I returned to the coat. I examined again the torn pocket lining and in doing so I made a further discovery. The *lining* of the *flap* of that pocket was badly *singed*. For the first time, then, I recalled that James Arms was left-handed!

That recollection opened up a vista of possibilities, and ten minutes later when I handed the garments back to Mrs. Arms I am sure that my eyes shone and my voice betrayed my excitement, for she regarded me with curiosity, and then covered her face with her apron and again burst into lamentations.

But Maggie spoke.

"You're going to get Joeie free!" she said, and her words trembled with excitement.

"I think so. Are you certain you can tell me nothing more?"

Maggie's eyelids fell and again the blood flooded her face.

"There is one thing more, sir," she said, "though I do not know its meaning. We tried to come in through the back door — ma and I — from the garden. It was open when Joeie first called, but as

we came near it closed and when we got to it it was locked."

"Horsford was still on the porch?"

"He must have been, for he was there when we got around to that side."

I looked at the girl until my gaze compelled hers.

"Is that all that you can tell me? *All?*" I asked.

"It is all that I know, sir," she answered, and turned to her mother with an expression of appeal.

I knew that there was still something for me to learn from her — but, if necessary, I could wait.

"How long is it since Mr. La Cour was here?" I asked abruptly turning to Mrs. Arms.

Maggie jumped to her feet with a startled cry, her eyes wide again with fear. Her mother raised a finger to her lips as if to hush me.

"'T is long," she said briefly, and added hastily: "No, no, not long. But will you not see the boy before you go, sir?"

I followed the mother into the darkened parlor.

CHAPTER XXXI

BY THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION

"**N**OW," I remarked to Milbrath a half hour later after relating to him the experiences just recorded, "what do you make of the case?"

We had just left our rooms, after brushing up a bit, for a short call at Red Gables.

Milbrath hesitated.

"I've no capacity for deduction," he said, "and at first I made nothing of it, until, indeed, you spoke of the locked door. From that it seems evident that a third person is involved — La Cour, perhaps."

"So far, so good. But do the upset chair, the position of the body, the character of the burns on the coat, the fact, indeed, that Arms was wearing a coat, tell no story to you?"

"No more than the very evident fact that Arms was shot at close range. The chair may have been overturned before or after the shot was fired, so far as I can see, or he may have upset it in falling. I don't know what you mean by the position of the body."

"Is n't the fact that the lining of the left-hand pocket was torn and singed significant to you?" I asked eagerly.

Milbrath pondered for a moment, then shook his head.

"It suggests nothing new to me — no theory as to the crime. As Arms was left-handed it is natural that the pocket on the left side should show more wear than the other. It was probably singed before to-day."

"Well, to me those points mean everything, for they make it evident that Jim Arms killed himself."

"What!" cried Milbrath. "Tell me how you get at that," he added with interest.

"I think the first suggestion came when I understood how Arms had fallen — that is, how he lay when he was found, though I was not conscious of it at the moment. As you remarked, the way the material was burned about the bullet hole showed that the firing was done at short range. Everything had been taken from the pockets of all the garments — the pockets had been dusted, even; but when I came to the torn lining in the coat pocket I 'felt warm,' as children say. A careful examination showed me that while the lining had undoubtedly first given way some time ago, its break had been added to quite recently; for fully an inch and a half of the stuff had not yet begun to fray. Then I found the singed lining of the flap of the pocket and at the same instant, I believe, recalled that Arms was left-handed. Then as, involuntarily, I raised the spot to see what my sense of smell would tell me of the age of the burn — even before I recognized it as fresh, I think that the solution of the situation came to me in an inspiration."

“What is the solution?”

“Well, Arms had a pistol in that pocket. With his hand in the pocket he was endeavoring to free it from the hole in the lining, in which it had caught, when he stumbled on the chair and toppled forward, throwing the chair at the same moment. In his effort to catch himself he naturally threw out his left hand. The motion freed the muzzle of the gun with a jerk and caused the fresh rent in the lining. At the same instant his involuntary pressure on the trigger discharged a bullet. The powder singed the lining of the flap and the bullet which, had the man been standing erect, would have sped off at an upward angle from him into the room, found its passage blocked by the trunk of his body, which had fallen forward. It took less time to follow these steps than to describe them to you now.”

“Jove!” cried Milbrath, “it’s a fortune in itself to be able to use the things one knows in that way. It’s marvelous!” He clapped me across the shoulders heartily in boyish enthusiasm.

“In my case it’s no gift; it’s Kilbourne’s tuition,” I said, and my thoughts flew to the lonely man far out at sea.

“But, Bliss, there are several points that you have n’t made clear to me yet. You’ve evolved a satisfactory theory as to the way of Arms’ death, but why was he trying to get at his gun in the haphazard way that you have represented. His mind did not seem to be on what he was doing.”

“That’s just it. His mind and his eyes, probably, were on some one before him who was driving

him back against the wall. His attention was directed toward this some one, but he was preparing to defend himself or to intimidate his adversary."

"And the 'some one' was La Cour, you think?"

"Undoubtedly. The fact that Arms wore his coat at the time of the tragedy indicated that he was 'dressed up.' Would he make himself fine for Horsford, for any of the neighboring farmers, indeed, when it was his custom to go into the village in his blouse or his shirt sleeves? No; he was prepared to see some one before whom he stood on his good behavior, and whom he knew to be about the place or about to arrive. I'm confident it was La Cour, and the next step is to ascertain whether La Cour is Summerfield. Perhaps Horsford's story will shed some light on that point. In any case, Horsford is not the man the police want, and I'll try to convince them of that to-morrow; likewise to learn what that terror-stricken Maggie is holding back. Jove! She's to be pitied — more than the mother, I think."

Milbrath agreed with me gravely.

"If they need help — money, you know — for the added expenses, or to live, I wish you would see that they get it — from me without my name." He spoke with diffidence.

"All right, Milbrath," I said, "I'll see to it."

"And for Horsford, too — anything. You understand?"

I understood perfectly that the best fellow that was ever held for a crime stood before me.

We had reached the triangle of woods by this time.

and were breaking into its gloom when the sound of rapid footsteps behind us arrested our attention and progress.

Directly we made out the figure of Gaspard hastening toward us.

"Pardon, m'sieus," he cried, "I haf but learned of your return. It iss of importance, said Edouard, zat zis lettre M'sieu Me'brath should at vonce receive."

He handed to Milbrath a square of creamy paper. Even in that light I recognized it to be such as I had seen upon Dolly's writing table.

As Milbrath tore the note from its cover I struck a match and held it so that he could read. An instant later the paper was in my hands and Milbrath held the match.

"Read it," he said.

The sheet contained but one line, and that, apparently, had been written in haste:

Please come to me at once. I am in great distress.

D. M.

The envelope, I observed, was addressed to Milbrath, or, in case of his absence, to me.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE AGITATION OF MR. MCCLURE

HALFWAY up the gravel walk to Red Gables we ceased to run. Dolly's voice singing an Irish lullaby to the tinkling accompaniment of her mandolin, fell gratefully upon our startled senses. A sudden hopefulness that we had merely read into her words that cry for help eased the tension of my feelings.

It was but a momentary relief, however, for with the next line of the song I recognized that her voice was tremulous and unnatural, and that the effect of cheerfulness was either a mask or an endeavor to sustain her courage.

Upon our approach she moved nervously and peered into the darkness; then rose from her chair and met us at the steps. In the light of the hanging porch lamp her features looked drawn, and her eyes were dilated.

Milbrath's studied composure broke at the sight. Without a thought, apparently, of who might be within the house to see, he took the girl in his arms.

"What is it, darling?" he asked softly.

Dolly buried her face in the broad shoulder which pillowed her head, and burst into tears. If I could have done so I would have turned and fled.

Presently Dolly raised her head, struggling bravely with her emotion. A wee smile glimmered through the dejection of her features, and she drew Milbrath to a tête-à-tête near where I sat.

"Listen," she whispered, pointing a finger upward.

Distinctly we heard a sound of which I had been conscious since the moment I reached the house — the unceasing click of the heels of a man's shoes on a hard floor, and their subdued fall upon rugs in the room above us.

"It is grandfather, and it has been like that, never pausing for more than a minute at a time, since his return, two hours ago."

"Return? From where?"

"I wish I knew. I have been in Providence and only reached home at seven o'clock. Just before that time Delia says, grandfather started out in the covered buggy, after behaving for an hour in a most extraordinary and unaccountable manner. I was waiting for him, here on the veranda, fearful but curious, for he has not driven alone after dark before in years, when he returned.

"He barely noticed me as he passed into the house; and, oh! his expression!" Dolly covered her eyes for a moment as if the memory were overpowering. "Only once before have I seen him with that shocked and haggard look, — when word came that Mr. Somhers had been killed. And then was the only time that I have known him to pace the floor as you hear him now."

"Have you spoken with him?" Milbrath asked.

"I have tried. Twice I have been to his room. Each time the door was closed and locked, and while he opened it upon my knock, it did me no more good than though he had answered from behind it. 'I can't let you in, little one,' he said the first time, and his words sounded as if he had said them many, many times before, 'there is a matter that I must think out quietly and alone. You cannot help me this time.' After that I sat on the porch and listened to his footsteps never resting, until I thought I should go mad. Then I went up to him again. That time I think that he scarcely knew what he was saying to me. It was so incoherent that I do not know now myself. It was about a friend who had startled him. I think he said that his drive had to do with the friend, but whether it was that he met the friend while he was driving, or went to meet the friend I do not know."

"Perhaps the friend came here?" Milbrath suggested.

Dolly shook her head.

"I have asked," she said. "Neither Delia nor Rose admitted any one to the house all day."

"Can it be that the Arms tragedy has unnerved him?" I asked casually, without, however, having much belief that such could be the case.

Again Dolly shook her head, this time emphatically.

"I, too, asked that question," she answered, "and Delia, who saw him return from the Arms cottage, where he went as soon as he heard of Jim's

death, said that though he looked shocked and sympathetic, he acted naturally and sat on the lawn and read for an hour before any one noticed any agitation in his manner."

"And you have been trying to restore him with your music, dear," Milbrath said softly, and he pressed Dolly's tiny hand more closely in his. "Poor little girl!"

"He loves these old folksongs and I knew that if anything would make him pause and listen and think of me alone down here, they would. But it has been half an hour since I began."

"Never mind, darling. The trouble cannot be so serious as it looks now. Perhaps, after all, you broke the spell, for listen! He has paused."

The footsteps had ceased, but before we could do more than exchange glances of pleasure, they were renewed.

"Shall Bliss and I make a try at the granddad?" Milbrath asked. Then he turned to me. "What do you say, Bliss. Shall we go up? Once he would do a good deal for me." A spasm of pain crossed his features, but passed directly. "And I believe he would now," he added. "It may be some trouble that he would rather confide first to a man. Doubtless he is exaggerating its seriousness."

"There is one peculiar point that I have not told you," Dolly said as we moved toward the staircase hall. "You know that grandfather never permits any one but himself to meet me at the station. He has always declared that service to be

his prerogative, and has even gone for me directly after one of his attacks. Well, this evening Edward met me."

Milbrath whistled softly.

"Yes?" he queried expectantly.

"The way it came about is the strangest part of this queer affair. After returning from the Arms cottage grandfather sat on the lawn, as I have said, and read for an hour. Just before six o'clock he called Delia and instructed her to tell Edward to have the phaeton ready for him in half an hour. That meant, of course, that he purposed to meet me, as usual. When the phaeton had waited before the door for ten minutes, Delia went up to the study to account for grandfather's unheard-of lateness. The door was closed, and she declares that grandfather was talking to himself in low, excited tones, and pacing the floor as he is doing now. She was afraid to knock, and crept downstairs again. Just as she reached the kitchen, grandfather whistled down through the tube and ordered Edward to harness the roan to the covered buggy and hitch her at the side entrance, and then to drive in the phaeton as fast as he could for me."

Milbrath turned upon me the oddest expression that I had ever seen upon his face. It was in one look a query and a desire for my denial, or so I read it, and I believed that the thought that had leaped into my brain had gone, also, to him.

"Can it be that Mr. McClure knows *him*?" I asked (meaning Summerfield), as we stood together before the study door. "And is it possible

that he threw himself upon Mr. McClure's protection after the tragedy to-day?"

"I don't want to think so," Milbrath answered soberly, "for that would mean another tangle, but it looks ——"

He did not finish his sentence then, for in response to our second knock there was the sound of a turning key and of an opening door, and Mr. McClure stood before us.

His back was to the light of the room, and against it his usually erect figure looked feeble and stooping. The light from the hall lamp shining on his face showed us that his eyes were bloodshot and anxious, and that the lines about them had deepened to furrows.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said quietly. "Will you come in?"

He held the door wide for us to pass, and as we did so I felt a thrill of excitement — as one will who is confronted suddenly by the unexpected. I was prepared, and I think that Milbrath was, for almost any kind of a reception except the one we were receiving. Quiet courtesy, Mr. McClure's usual manner, had been outside our anticipation. But there we were, seating ourselves at his request in Mr. McClure's study, and there was Milbrath, fumbling a little nervously, perhaps, at his watch fob and saying hesitatingly:

"We have n't meant to intrude upon you, grand-dad McClure, but Dolly's a bit unnerved by your evident trouble and her seeming inability to help you. Now, if we could do what she cannot —

one or both of us — perhaps we could relieve things all around.”

Mr. McClure had paced the width of the room and back during Milbrath's little speech. He paused abruptly and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

“Thank you, my boy, thank you,” he said, and his voice trembled. “If there were anything that mortal could do, next to my little Dolly I should trust you, and our good friend here, with it. It is useless to deny that I have been troubled; aye in dire distress; but it was a matter in which no human counsel would avail, one which I must settle according to my light — and alone.” He sank into a chair, and covered his face with his long, shriveled, tanned hands. “And I have settled it at last, I believe,” he added presently. His hands dropped to the arms of the chair, and he heaved a great sigh, as if of relief.

“Then, if you will permit the suggestion, sir, I think that you should see Dolly for a moment, to ease her mind, and afterward get to bed at once. You appear to be worn out.”

A shadow of the man's winsome smile played about Mr. McClure's features for an instant.

“That I will do,” he answered. “You may send the little one to me as you go down, and directly afterward I will go to my room. Please believe that I am grateful to both of you for coming to my assistance.”

He held out a hand to each of us, cordially, but clearly in dismissal, and I saw slipping from me

all opportunity to learn whether Richard La Cour were known to him as well as to James Arms, and, perhaps, whether Richard La Cour were, indeed, Philander Summerfield.

I believed that I understood Mr. McClure well enough to know that a night's rest would only add strength to the resolution he seemed to have made to confide in no one, and if his trouble concerned La Cour and I would ascertain the fact, I must learn it that evening. If the name were unfamiliar to him no harm could come, surely, from my mention of it.

"Mr. McClure," I ventured, bracing myself to the occasion, "I regret to trouble you with the subject this evening, but it seems imperative. The crime, or accident, at the cottage to-day appears now to have added another complication to the matter that brought me to Winton, and which I know that you are as interested as any one to see cleared up. It may save Mr. Milbrath and me a great deal of detailed work if you will tell us whether you have ever known a man named Richard La Cour?"

The expression of dread which sprang into Mr. McClure's eyes at my first words gave way to one of cold reserve, as if he were prepared to hold at any cost to the vow of silence which he had imposed upon himself, and, at last, to undisguised relief.

He shook his head promptly.

"I have never before heard the name," he answered.

"I believe that he is also known as 'Philander Summerfield,'" I continued.

"Nor do I know that name — 'Philander Summerfield.' Curious!"

The expression of dread was again in Mr. McClure's eyes, and he suddenly steadied himself against the back of a chair.

"He has been an occasional visitor at the Arms cottage this summer. He was there to-day, I believe, and whether responsible for or innocent of the death of Arms, for Joe Horsford's sake he must be apprehended and made to tell what he knows about it. I believe, moreover, that when we do get him we shall have the man who knows why and how Mr. Somhers died."

Mr. McClure's thin body swayed slightly and his averted face was ghastly. I needed no more to assure me that my words had touched the open wound in the man's breast.

My mind revolted against further probing, but, with fierce determination, I cast sentiment aside.

"If these names are strange to you, then, of course, we must continue our investigations without your assistance, unless, indeed, Summerfield has still a third cognomen by which he is known to you. I will confide to you that for some time we entertained a theory that this man might be a brother of Peter Somhers — Francis Somhers, who is supposed to have died long ago. More recent developments appear to disprove that hypothesis; but, of course, our new evidence may prove to be false, and Summerfield may really be related to Mr.

Sombers. In that case, and especially if he be another Cain, our discovery will avail little, I fear, as Milbrath will remain in the present shadow in preference to exposing his relative."

Mr. McClure raised his eyes to Milbrath in a glance of quick inquiry. He appeared about to speak, and then to think about it and remain silent.

"I do not know the name 'La Cour' or that of 'Summerfield,'" he said after a moment, and with intense weariness. "I do not see that I can help you, though God knows that I want you to be wholly free again, my poor Harry, my boy!"

He dropped into a chair and buried his face in his folded arms upon a table.

And thus we left him for Dolly to comfort.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT MAGGIE KNEW

WHEN I saw him in the Beverly jail, Horsford was hollow-eyed and pale, the effects of a sleepless night of anxiety, but his faith that I would help him had not deserted him.

"I did no' do it, sir, you know that?" he said in a dull voice.

"Certainly I know it, Horsford. I have n't doubted you for a minute, but who did do it? Can you tell me that?"

Horsford looked about to see whether the guard had left us, and finding that he was out of earshot he said slowly:

"Aye, sir. I 'ave a fancy. There were a stranger there yesterday."

"Did you hear his name?"

"I did not, sir. It were this way: I went hover for the money, as you know, sir. I 'eard loud words before I got to the kitchen door, and Jim were sayin':

"'No, you don't get ye're gun now nor ever 'til ye've made me a even five 'undred. God! What d'ye s'ppose I'm keepin' ye from the gallows fur, ol' man? Fur my *pleasure*?' They were 'is words, sir, an' 'e laughed 'is cruel laugh. I could no' 'ear

the words of the answer, sir, but they come fast fur a space, and I 'eard your name, 'Bliss,' sir. Then my foot touched the steps, and I 'eard some one run across the floor. It were a man, not tall as you, sir, with gray 'air and a beard. That were all I could see. 'E went into the back entry. Jim turned 'round on me an' I thought 'e would strike me.

"'Gol durn ye!' 'e shouted, 'ye bad penny! Why could no' ye wait 'til noon. I'll 'ave the money then, nor some un'll be in jail. Clear along wi' ye!'

"They were 'is words again, sir. I'd not opened my mouth to speak. But I went hout to the stable. I meant to take Grayskin back with me. I 'ad got 'er away from the stable and near to the 'ouse when the shot came hand I knew where it was from. I let go the 'alter and ran to the kitchen. And there lay Jim hon the floor, sir, and 'e were dead."

"Yes," I assented, "and then?"

"Then I ran to the porch and called to the women, and they come hup. You know the rest, sir."

"You let the man with the gray hair get away!" I cried.

"I did n't think of 'im again, sir — 'pon my word I did n't — till I were back 'ome, sir. When I tried to tell the hoffer who took me, 'e laughed. 'You'll 'ave a chance to tell that to the coroner,' were hall 'e 'd say."

I turned the situation over in my mind and decided upon a course of action.

"Have patience, Joe. You'll not be here long,"

I promised as I left him. "I'll see that the little wife and boy get over to see you to-day. She's doing well these days, is the wife, Joe?"

"Aye, sir!" and Joe's face lighted with the thought.

The only evidence of value to me that the coroner had taken from the scene of the tragedy was the revolver from which the shot was fired. I looked at its silver mountings, its old-fashioned but exquisite workmanship and the intertwined initials "P. S." embossed on the butt, and back to the face of the officer beside me.

"Do you contend that this was Joseph Horsford's pistol?" I asked the man.

"Sure not. We think it's one the old gentleman Somhers gave Arms long ago. Them's his initials there, 'P. S.,' you see."

There was a remote chance that such a theory was correct. Therefore I accepted it tentatively.

"Will you tell me how you account for the fact that Horsford had it?"

The officer looked embarrassed.

"I'm not well up on the case, as I'm not the man who took Joe Horsford," he said. "But I believe the idea is that Arms had lent it to Joe some time."

"I suppose there have been no developments in the case to-day?"

"None that I have heard of."

I bade the man good day and drove directly to the Arms house. It had an air of being deserted, but Maggie answered my knock. Black rings had

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found their way about her eyes and her face was colorless. Altogether she looked too ill to be up.

"No; don't call your mother," I said as she intimated that she would do so. "My business is with you. I've heard Joe Horsford's story and I know what you failed to tell me last night. Mr. La Cour was here yesterday."

Maggie sank into a chair.

"Did Joeie know about Mr. La Cour?" she half whispered, her eyes full of terror.

"He knew that he was here with Jim while you were in the garden — an elderly man with a gray beard and blue eyes — (I saw from Maggie's expression that the description fitted the man) — from whom Jim got money at intervals and who ——" But I got no further for, with a little cry, Maggie covered her ears with her hands. And then she did just what I might have known that she would do; she fainted.

My efforts to get water for the girl brought Mrs. Arms from the darkened parlor. She looked pitifully old and feeble in the morning light, but she had her grief in control. Her face lighted at sight of me.

"Ah!" she cried. "It were fur ye I've looked hup the road all the mornin'. Maggie will say out all there is to tell, or I will speak for 'er." Then she caught sight of the unconscious girl.

It was fully ten minutes before we had her restored sufficiently to question. Even then I was loath to agitate her. But Mrs. Arms felt otherwise.

"It's 'ard fur Maggie," she said with a pitying

glance at the girl, "but ye must know all, sir. Maggie, s'ppose ye go to the buttery and get the gentleman a glass o' wine, and I will tell 'im."

The girl shook her head.

"After," she said briefly, and her eyes said plainly that nothing that she was likely to hear or that could result would be worse than the silent misery she had already endured.

"It's about the ol' gentleman," Mrs. Arms continued, "an' what we know, though it is no' much, may 'elp Joeie. Ye rec'lect I spoke a time back about Mr. La Cour?"

"Yes; Jim's friend who stopped here sometimes."

"Aye; the same. But it were Jim as were the good friend, an' out o' the kindness o' 'is 'eart took 'im in. For 'e should 'ave been in prison, sir! Hist ye! *'T were 'e as killed the old master!* 'im! Not 'Arry Milbrath, mind ye, but *'im!*"

She lowered her voice to a dramatic whisper as she spoke these words and leaned toward me with one finger raised to emphasize each slowly uttered syllable.

Notwithstanding my pre-conviction of this fact I felt a chill crawl up my backbone and set the hairs of my head on end.

"You have known this — how long?"

"Sin' last night only, sir, when ye 'ad gone an' Maggie feared fur 'er life in the night an' come an' tol' me all. She 'as known since the airly summer when Mr. La Cour began to come, but Jamie said she would be killed, too, 'f she let any un

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know as 'e were 'ere. They ne'er tol' me, sir, lest my ol' tongue 'd wag — as hit did to ye that day."

"Was Mr. La Cour here when you went to the garden yesterday morning?"

"Aye, sir. Or so I've believed sin' Maggie tol' me this. 'E were 'ere at breakfast, but started away as soon as it were over, an' Jamie said 'e were gone. But I've been thinkin' as Jamie knew 'e 'd be back, an' so 't was 'e 'urried us off to the berry patch an' put on 'is coat and collar. 'E were very careful wi' 'is dress, were Jamie, when the hold gentleman come."

"Did you not think of Mr. La Cour when you found your son dead? Could you for a moment believe that your nephew did it?"

"I thought of nothin', sir, but that Jamie wur dead."

"And you?" I said, turning to Maggie and trying to speak gently. "Did you think of Mr. La Cour?"

She nodded.

"I thought of 'im, for his words with Jamie were ofttimes 'ot, but I thought that 'e 'ad gone, and that it must ha' been Joeie."

She glanced about her nervously, as if afraid of an avenging fury even as she spoke.

"When did you first think that he might have done it?"

"After the coroner came, when I thought 'ow the back door closed in our faces, and Joeie on the porch."

"Are you certain that Mr. La Cour got away?"

Maggie shivered.

"'E must 'ave, sir. Would 'e stay after *that*?"

I thought of Red Gables, and of Mr. McClure, but I said:

"Probably not, especially as he knew the way through the woods to the station."

"You know that, sir!"

"Yes; and many other things. Do not fear that he will ever return and harm you. He will never come here again. Had he been here since Monday?"

"Since Friday, sir." She hesitated, but it was plain that her fear was passing. "'E was afraid of you, sir."

"Of me? Do you know why?"

"I—I 'eard 'im say once when 'e was wild ('e was often wild, sir, either with laughter or with anger, but this time it was with something else—fear, I thought, sir)—'e said that you would get 'im."

"Maggie," I said quietly after a moment's silence, "when Mr. Somhers was killed you were afraid of something. Did you think that your brother had killed him?"

"I thought—oh, the Lord forgive me! Yes, sir; I thought it was Jamie, for 'e had said that either the old master or Harry should die."

She paused, gasped, and then covered her face with her hands and broke into a storm of tears.

Within another hour I had learned that Mr. La Cour had left Winton by the evening train the day before. He had appeared on the station plat-

form, as usual, just as the train was coming in, and Hutton had noticed nothing unusual in his appearance.

While I was puzzled as to where he had hidden himself between the time of the tragedy and the evening hour when Mr. McClure's agitation became evident, my calmer reason of the morning strengthened my conviction that it was the man known to the Arms family as La Cour who had been the cause of Mr. McClure's distress and of his drive after nightfall in the covered buggy.

When I returned to Overlook, Gaspard met me with an air of importance.

"M'sieu shall now know," he said, "vhere zee ol' man run zee day in zee — tun-nel iss it? — zee place under zee ground? See!"

He extended his open palm on which lay a small Greek cross in gold with the letters "P. S." forming a monogram in tiny diamond chips in the centre. I recognized it as a watch charm that Philander Summerfield had worn on the day he sought me in New York.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"In zee hothouse, m'sieu. Vill m'sieu come and see?"

I followed the man to the abandoned hothouse, into which I stepped for the first time, and there found an explanation for the only feature of the case that I had so far encountered (except Mr. McClure's connection with it), which remained open to speculation: how Philander Summerfield had eluded us.

Far under a bench, and next to a side wall where Gaspard found the charm, the dust which covered everything in the place showed recent disturbance, and footprints that were neither mine nor Gaspard's were visible in both directions on the floor. What is more, they were the prints of square-toed shoes!

I anathematized myself for a blockhead, a blunderer, an idiot, as I realized how easily I had been beaten at my own game of cunning; and I blushed to think how amateurish my handling of the case must appear to that subtle old sinner himself who so many times had boldly waved the red flag in my face, only to slip away from me when I reached out to grasp him.

A week later, with eyes that saw the case clearly for the first time I thanked an all-wise Providence that Philander Summerfield *did* escape me that morning, stupid though it made me out to be; for, to have taken him then would have been to bring to disaster what had come to be the real purpose of my investigation — the vindication of the name of Harrison Milbrath.

Mr. McClure I did not further trouble. The memory of his tortured face rose before me with every thought of him and made the pain that I had inflicted seem unwarrantable in view of the little that I had gained for my case. I did not see him again for several days, for exhaustion followed his evening of excitement, and for two days Dolly refused to permit even Milbrath to speak with him.

When, however, we met again, he appeared to have accepted the amends I had tried to make to him in the shape of fruit and flowers, in the spirit in which they were sent, and greeted me with his usual cordiality and friendliness. But no word of what had been said at our last meeting was mentioned, or was reference made to the death of Jim Arms. Only the new lines of pain in the kind old face remained as evidence of the mental struggle through which he had passed, or was passing; but from that hour I felt that Chauncey McClure believed me to know all that I surmised, and later I found that he credited me with the possession of facts the existence of which at that time I was far from suspecting. Yet he held his peace.

The day following the Arms tragedy, after a talk with Milbrath, who was unwilling to connect himself with Horsford's case, I laid before the coroner and the chief of police in Beverly the results of my investigations in the matter; and, twenty-four hours later, Horsford was back at Overlook upon Milbrath's bond, given through me, pending the public examination which the coroner had set for the following Wednesday.

While I had been detailed and explicit in relating to the officers my line of deductions that resulted in my conviction that Arms' death was due to an accident and not to murder, and had told them all that I had learned from the Arms women about *La Cour as La Cour* I refrained from any reference to the fact that I had come in contact with the man, and the name of Philander Summerfield was not mentioned.

Nevertheless I determined to force Summerfield's hand by this very trump card — my unspoken belief, and the day that gave Horsford his conditional freedom found a letter on its way to Boston in which I informed Mr. Summerfield that a man answering his description was wanted in Winton for the death, or as a witness to the accidental death, of a farmer named Arms, and that he was in great danger of being taken and held for the crime unless he came forward and gave an account of his whereabouts on the fifth of September.

These things accomplished there seemed little need for our presence in Winton, and a great desire to get away seized me. The way that I had taken hold of the Arms mystery appeared professional to the people of the two villages, and the original suspicion that I was investigating the Somhers mystery became a conviction.

Moreover, Milbrath, whose beard had for a time disguised him, had been recognized, and the cordiality or the coldness with which he was received by his old acquaintances had so telling an effect on his spirits that I suggested a return to Boston.

"Gaspard can forward by special delivery any mail that comes, so there will be little delay in getting the answer if we hear from the Virginia advertisement or from Summerfield," I said. "Moreover, we shall be on the spot when the men on the case have something to report."

"Some one of them is bound to report some time, I suppose," Milbrath answered, "but it seems a deuced long time since they went to work, and

there've been no results from them yet. If the men at the Park Square station are up to their duty the old fellow must have got into town by another route — if he is there."

"Well, the police throughout the country are on the lookout for him now, wherever he is, and he may find it difficult to evade them for long unless he changes his guise, which he may do, of course. I'm of the opinion that in any case he will return to Boston sooner or later. Then it is a mere matter of time until we get him. By the way, I wonder whether we'd better have the outgoing transatlantic steamers watched?"

Milbrath laughed.

"We shall have the whole private detective force of Boston at our beck and call if we continue to draw on it," he said. "But anything to win. Have every dock in the country sentineled if you think best."

"I'll consider that! But we will go to Boston in the morning. Going to Red Gables now?"

We had risen from the supper table and McClureward was Milbrath's usual outlook at that hour.

Milbrath nodded and smiled.

"The old story of the spider and the fly. Will you come with me?"

"Not now, thanks. I think I'll have another look at some of the things in the little room. Perhaps I'll step over in time to walk back with you. In any case, give my best to the old gentleman and the little wife."

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHAT THE BLOTTER REVEALED

I SAT on the portico and smoked until the soft darkness closed in around me. Then I took a lighted lamp and went into the little room which Milbrath and I had not entered together since that memorable Sunday evening.

Everything about the tiny apartment appeared to be as I had left it on the following morning. The gaping aperture made by the splintered door resembled the entrance to a cavern, and the Mephistopheles behind the tree in the picture above the desk peered down upon the devastation with an expression that in the uncertain light of one lamp appeared wholly diabolical.

A thought too wild, it seemed, to be anything but fancy had been developing in my mind during the past few hours, since a visit in the afternoon to the little room, and I was in the same little room again to verify it by further evidence or reject it.

Seating myself before the desk I rolled back the top. Then I drew from my pocket the contract that I had made with Philander Summerfield on August 16th.

Ah! I was quicker to detect differences in handwriting than I had been when Murray Kilbourne

assured me that the signature of Mr. Summerfield was assumed. How plainly I saw the difference now! What was more, I saw that the filled-in portions of the contract form were a cross between the bold hieroglyphics of Peter Somhers and the cramped, small hand of Philander Summerfield, while the signature was almost a facsimile of that which Philander Summerfield had made upon the two contracts that we had found!

I passed my hands across my eyes, and for an instant sat in silence, dreading to take the next step.

I turned, finally, to the blue, much blurred blotter upon the desk, with its border of tiny ink dots, as if their maker had sat with a well-wet pen in his hand through many an abstracted moment. I had worked out a theory that the blotter could tell. Would it tell it? I turned the magnifying glass upon it with bated breath.

The mass of blur was so heavy that at first I could distinguish nothing, but persevering I detected, at length, a letter for which I looked — a capital S. After a little further study I found, also, a capital P. But that which lay between the two letters was too indistinct to read.

It occurred to me to turn the blotter, and I did so. It was almost as much used on the one side as on the other. No; I could make out a little more!

With the help of the lens I picked out innumerable capitals — always the same, P. and S., P. and S. But soon I found that they were in a different

style of handwriting. Presently I found the key. One was the handwriting of Peter Somhers, the other of Philander Summerfield. I could not doubt it.

I sprang to my feet and held the blotter to the mirror. There the names appeared over and over again, indistinct and in places almost illegible, but there, nevertheless. But it was Philander Summerfield always, never Peter Somhers, as at first I supposed. My mistake was due to the fact that the signature changed gradually from the bold uprightness of Peter Somhers' chirography to the smaller hand of Philander Summerfield!

In my excitement I did not notice the approach of footsteps and I was pacing up and down the tiny room, muttering to myself when Milbrath's voice brought me back to my senses.

"You back so soon!" I cried; "was no one at home?"

"The evening must have been interesting to you," he answered dryly. "It is considerably past ten o'clock."

And so it was. The two hours that I had spent in the little room had passed like so many minutes.

"What's the matter with you, old man?" asked Milbrath, coming nearer to me. "Is it the way the light falls on you or are you —— Lord! Bliss. You *are* pale —— ghostly! What's up?"

He glanced hastily about as if expecting to find the reason for my changed color in some tangible form, and his eyes paused in question on the blotter that I still held.

"Come here and pinch me," I said. "Pinch hard. I want to be sure that I'm not dreaming. Ouch! Yes; that's real enough. Now, see whether this is."

I outlined with a pencil the letters as I had found them, and then again held the blotter before the mirror.

"Whose handwriting is it?" I asked.

"Why, it's uncle's," answered Milbrath promptly.

"All of it?"

"Well, this, surely, is his, and this, and this. Here it changes and is almost like some one's else — Summerfield's, no doubt, and here it is entirely disguised."

"Do these facts signify nothing to you, Milbrath?"

Milbrath looked at me sharply.

"I suppose they show that uncle was to take on old Summerfield's handwriting when Summerfield became him, so to speak. And I dare say it may signify what I had n't thought of before, that he purposed to be Summerfield during the time — a sort of change of mantles — if that is what you mean."

"It is not at all what I mean. It seems to me altogether unlikely that Mr. Somhers would play the part of Summerfield while Summerfield was doing Somhers. I wish to God it were probable, though."

"Then, for heaven's sake, what *do* you mean?" cried Milbrath.

In answer I reached under the desk and brought

forth a book that I had found there behind the typewriter that afternoon when I took the machine out to get a sample of its type.

It was a scrapbook with a cover of red and white mottled pasteboard, and on the back of black linen was pasted a square of white paper on which was labeled in the bold, upright hand that was unquestionably Mr. Somhers', one word:

"PERSONAL."

It was filled with newspaper clippings, and as Milbrath took the book in his hands and opened it I knew that he was wondering, as I had wondered, what on earth Peter Somhers, a reticent, retiring man, could have found about himself in print, or have put in print, that would fill a volume like that.

From cover to cover it contained nothing but reports of the coroner's inquiry into the death of Peter Somhers, and of Harrison Milbrath's two trials!

Milbrath fingered the leaves of the book, at first with a surprised expression, and then with a puzzled, questioning look.

Presently he looked up from it and off into space. When his eyes returned to mine, I knew that he had reached the conclusion that seemed inevitable.

"Great God! Bliss," he whispered. "You don't mean to tell me that uncle put these clippings in here; that — he — is — Summerfield?"

"It looks like that."

"Then he is La Cour."

"Yes."

Milbrath hid his head in his folded arms on the couch and his big frame shook with emotion. Presently he lifted his chin to his hands, his elbows resting on the couch, and again stared off into space. He appeared to be thinking deeply. Then he sat upright and his face was colorless.

"Yes," he said, "I see it now — why granddad McClure flinched at the name of Summerfield, why he could not tell — why Arms remained here so long, and why he harbored — La Cour — Summerfield — *him*! He knew something which we have yet to learn, something that we have probably not dreamed of yet. And it was the other, the real Summerfield, who lay out there with uncle's ring upon his finger and fooled the world! Yes, yes. I see it now!"

I made no answer, and after a moment Milbrath continued:

"Can it be that the compact between uncle and Summerfield was that Summerfield was to die?"

I dissented with energy.

"Of what earthly use would a fortune of thirty thousand dollars be to a dead man without friends?" I asked. "Moreover, the contract stipulated that the impersonation was to be for a year, if Mr. Somhers desired."

Milbrath groaned.

"So it did. I didn't credit the possibility, myself. I — think — I was only trying to find an explanation that does n't make the truth so hideous.

"I don't believe this is all new to me," he went on after a slight pause. "Half a dozen times I've been on the point of asking you whether the eyes of the man called Summerfield, whom we've both seen, were not more like uncle's than Summerfield's of the picture. So, I've been pretty near the brink of a revelation, you see. But, Bliss, how can it be just as it looks now? Uncle would never *kill*. Why, he was not even a sportsman because he could not see blood shed. It must have been an accident — the death of Summerfield, as you proved that of Arms to be."

I wished with all my heart that I could encourage Milbrath.

"That might be," I answered, "but his reason for letting the body be found as it was — of permitting it to be mistaken for his — and for letting you bear the responsibility for the — accident? How do you explain those things?"

Milbrath gazed at me silently, and the light that had sprung to his eyes flickered out.

"He is the only one who can answer those questions," he said presently. "But there is some terrible mistake still to be explained, or Uncle Peter was not the man I always believed him."

I had long since reached the conclusion that Peter Somhers had not lived the life of an upright man, but it was useless, without proof, to upset Milbrath's beautiful faith in his uncle's integrity.

There was a long pause. Then Milbrath rose wearily.

"If you will excuse me I think I will go to my room now," he said, and as he passed me he laid a hand upon my shoulder.

"You've been a good friend to me, Bliss, and I appreciate your efforts of the last weeks. I'd give everything I own to change the past for him; but since it is unalterable, I suppose it is better that I should know the facts and make the best of them. Of course this last discovery changes the aspect of everything. We can no longer go on in our efforts to bring him to justice. You understand?"

"I know what you mean. But you forget that the police are after La Cour, and it is only a matter of time when he will be brought to Beverly to explain his connection with the Arms tragedy. It's up to him to make good then, and I believe he'll do it for that case. But the other! In the circumstances would it not be wiser for us to write to him—or see him if we can—and let him know that we know who he is?"

Milbrath considered the question for a moment; then he signified his acquiescence.

"Will you write? Tell him that I bear no ill will against him."

I followed Milbrath out of the little room, but paused in the library to write a short letter which I addressed to "Philander Summerfield."

Then I went out to the portico and endeavored to turn my thoughts from the revelations of the evening into pleasant channels. But no sooner came a moment's diversion than the muffled sound

of footfalls in Milbrath's room brought me back with a shock to the remorseless present.

Milbrath's face had aged visibly when we met at the breakfast table seven hours later. I wondered whether he had found any rest, for, until dawn I had heard him moving about his room, which was next to mine.

When I had given Gaspard orders to be ready to drive us to the Beverly station at ten o'clock, and the man had left the room, Milbrath turned to me in question.

"To Boston?"

"Yes; you are to go with me, you know."

"That was yesterday. Bliss, we can't go on hunting him down, we simply can't. If the police get him for the Arms affair, that's another matter and we can try to get him out of it without betraying him. But this is different. I'm the one who is most concerned now, you see, and I want to drop the case."

"And I don't want to drop it. I can't drop it now."

Milbrath was silent for a brief space. When he spoke his voice appealed.

"Bliss," he said. "You've been my friend in need and I hope that you are not going back on me?"

"Never!"

"Then will it make any difference in your present determination to go on if I tell you that it would only be doubling my trouble for you to succeed? I believe life would be unbearable to me if you exposed that old man!"

"You will see things in a different light some time. Two wrongs never made a right, remember."

Milbrath hesitated.

"Once I offered to double Summerfield's reward if you found the person who killed uncle. Will you believe that I know my mind at this moment if I agree to treble the sum if you will drop the case as it stands now? This is an expression of my wishes; it is not a bribe."

Treble the sum! That would mean sixty thousand dollars! And if I declined this proposition what could I hope to gain from my summer's work? Nothing; absolutely nothing. I could no longer claim Summerfield's reward, nor Milbrath's, if I went on now against his wishes.

Perhaps it was that I wanted the glory of having won, of having solved a riddle wrongly answered by some of the cleverest detective skill in the country. I do not know. But certain it is that my indecision was for a moment only.

"I can't drop it—can't drop it," I declared with reiterated obstinacy. "I'm your friend, yes; and it is my duty, if there were no other reason, to keep you from taking a step that will only add to your unhappiness in the long run. But this much I will promise, Milbrath. By no mischance that I am responsible for, shall he be arrested or his case made public—or until you give the word. What I want is to talk with him, man to man. Perhaps then we may find a way wholly to vindicate you while concealing the awkward truth."

"Give me your hand on that," said Milbrath.

And we shook. "Now I will go with you anywhere, and do your bidding as before. Ten o'clock we are to leave here, did you say?"

"Yes; that will give me a moment's talk at the station with the Pingree Agency man who is due here about that time."

"A detective down here! At Overlook?"

"To join forces with Gaspard. I can't leave him here alone while Summerfield is at large, improbable as it is that he will ever return."

Milbrath offered no comment to this explanation; and we each smoked a cigar in the shade of the morning-glory vines on the side porch with the passing of scarcely a word until Gaspard drew rein before us in the dogcart and thus reminded us that the time had arrived for us to depart.

When we reached Boston there was a letter awaiting me at the Parker House. It had been mailed from Station C in Boston on the previous day and consisted of one piece of paper. On it was written:

DEAR YOUNG MAN: A free conscience has no need for worry. Being innocent of the crime against the man Arms I find no reason to surrender myself for examination, as you suggest.

When it seems desirable to have another conference with you I shall again communicate with you.

Yours with respect,

PHILANDER SUMMERFIELD.

"Jove! There's finished villainy for you!" I exclaimed to Milbrath. "Well, we'll see whether

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our next conference awaits upon Mr. Summerfield's time! By the way, do you observe how this letter is addressed? Not to Winton, from where my communications to him have been dated, but here — to this hotel!"

CHAPTER XXXV

RUN TO EARTH

WE had been in Boston for three days before anything of note occurred. During that time we were in daily communication with the men on the case and were led into following up one or two false clues. But even that was just as well, perhaps, for activity with disappointing results was better for us at that time than idleness.

In every morning's mail came a report from Crandall, the detective stationed at Overlook, but there had been no news in any one of them.

On Monday morning an envelope postmarked "Richmond, Va.," lay among the letters awaiting me in the hotel office. I found that it was signed by "Herbert Harris," and in substance was as follows:

My attention has been attracted by your extraordinary advertisement in the Richmond *Times* of to-day.

A Philander Summerfield was an instructor in history in the University of Virginia for two years, 18— to 18—. He was a man of ability, but wasted his best energies in dreams of things that he never accomplished.

I was an assistant in the university at the time of his instructorship there and came to know him well. He was a man of forty, or thereabouts, I should judge, of

medium height, and with dark brown hair and a mustache of the same color. He was inclined to stoop, and was somewhat negligent in his dress. His eyes were his most remarkable feature, light blue-gray with heavy white lids which betrayed his tendency to the impractical.

He left Charlottesville to accept a position as tutor to the son of a wealthy New Yorker, and the last that I heard of him — about three years later — he was still with the young man and traveling in Europe.

If there is any further information that I can give you about Mr. Summerfield, please call upon me.

“There,” I said, tossing the letter to Milbrath, “what do you think of that?”

Milbrath read the letter through and handed it back to me.

“I cannot see that we have gained much,” he said thoughtfully. “Whether, for instance, he left any near relatives. Yes; I know that he told Mr. Grayson that he had no living relatives—but he may have had, and if we can do anything for them——”

“Yes; well, will you come with me?” I said, starting up.

“Where?”

“To a photographer, the first who can do some copying this morning.”

“You mean to have the picture of uncle copied?”

“Yes, with your permission, and the other. We shall see whether Mr. Herbert Harris recognizes one of them as the Philander Summerfield he knew.”

We were not long in finding a photographer who could copy, develop and print the pictures for us, and that afternoon a special delivery letter left the Boston post office for Mr. Herbert Harris, Richmond, Virginia.

The answer was as prompt, and reached me three days later in an hour of excitement.

Mr. Harris knew his man, unquestionably.

Although considerably aged since I last saw him, the print that I have marked with a cross is without doubt of Mr. Summerfield. The expression of the eyes is unmistakable. The other print, while very like him, must be of another man.

Answering your inquiry as to Mr. Summerfield's family connections, I regret that I can give you little information on the point. That he had no immediate relatives I am certain, for I remember that he alluded to the fact on several occasions.

"The brother story was all a pleasant fiction on Mr. Somhers' part," I remarked — "when he called upon Grayson, you know."

Milbrath nodded.

"I did not doubt it in the least," he said, "the only question in my mind now is concerning this Summerfield himself — his identity."

"And that we shall soon know, if I am not mistaken," I answered.

We had just received a message from the Pingree Agency that one of our men was starting to us with news and he was announced at that moment.

"We have traced the old gentleman, sir," he said to Milbrath as he entered.

My heart jumped into my throat and my quick glance at Milbrath showed me that he had gone white to the lips.

"Tell us about it," he managed to articulate, as he motioned the man to a chair.

"I'm on the post office day watch, sir, and this morning, just as I was going on duty, who should I see at the main entrance but the old man. His maneuvers first attracted my attention, for he seemed to be peering into the lobby as if ready to turn back on the instant. As soon as I made sure he was the man I wanted, I called a herdic and stood waiting by the curb when he came out followed by the night watch. Evidently the old man didn't suspect he was followed till he looked back and saw Mr. Hays — the other man, sir. But he knew it then, for he darted down the steps like a rabbit and ran for a cab that was standing near. Hays and I had agreed upon some signals for use in a situation like this, and I signaled to him to hold back and let the old man think he had made a mistake in believing he was followed, while I kept behind him. So when the old gentleman drove on, I drove on; when his horse trotted mine did likewise, when his went slow, mine went ditto. We wound around the city unnecessarily, I should judge, and brought up in Dorchester at 116 — Street. I saw the old gentleman go in by latchkey at that address. That, I believe, sir, is all that you instructed me to do?"

"Yes," answered Milbrath, "that was all. And that is all you did?"

"It is, sir, except to return to the agency and report, and I was sent direct to you — to Mr. Bliss, was the name."

"Mr. Bliss is my friend here, but in this case it is all the same."

"Very well, sir." And bidding us good day he was gone.

I put on my mackintosh and picked up an umbrella — for there was a drizzling rain outside — but Milbrath made no move to accompany me. He sat with one elbow on a chair arm and his head in his hand.

"Are you not going with me?" I asked.

"I suppose so. You will not take the police into your confidence?"

"Not at present. Not at all, probably, unless you are willing."

We found the house we sought to be a modest and neat three-story and basement brick structure. There was an apothecary's shop on the corner next door, and we went in there and made inquiry about the house. It was conducted by Mrs. Raymond, the clerk told us, and was a quiet and exclusive furnished-room place.

Thus primed, we called upon Mrs. Raymond, an intelligent woman past middle life.

"Had she any rooms to rent? Yes; two, en suite, vacated unexpectedly that morning."

On what floor?

The second; fine large rooms with a private bath between them.

We asked to see the rooms, and were shown up a comfortably carpeted staircase to a room looking out upon the street through a "swell front" window. It was unusually well furnished for a lodging house, and I think the landlady saw our interchange of surprised glances as Milbrath and I looked around us, for she remarked that a recent long illness of her husband had made it necessary for her to throw open her house temporarily.

The rear room was furnished as a sleeping room, and both rooms and the bath were pictures of comfort.

"You have an acquaintance of ours with you," I said abruptly as we looked about, "Mr. Summerfield?"

Mrs. Raymond repeated the name and shook her head.

"No person of that name has ever roomed here," she said.

"I beg your pardon!" I cried in amazement, "I was told only this morning that he was here."

"I have never heard the name before."

"An elderly gentleman with a gray beard and light-blue eyes."

"That answers the description of Mr. Emerson, who had these rooms."

"And left to-day? Queer if Summerfield assumed a name," I remarked in a theatrical aside and looked at Milbrath.

"Did he tell you where he was leaving for, madam?"

Mrs. Raymond answered us in the negative, and regarded us questioningly.

"When he engaged the rooms two weeks ago he paid me in advance for a month, but told me that he might be called away at any moment, and to-day the summons evidently came. He left scarcely more than an hour ago."

"Ah! I wonder whether the poor old man received bad news from home?"

"Why, did he have a home?" asked Mrs. Raymond in surprise. "I have no wish to gossip about him, but he scarcely appeared like a home man. He was very uneasy and nervous most of the time and I fancied that he had some business worry. When he came he told me that he was without acquaintances in Boston, but as I require references he asked me to call upon the First National Bank."

That was the bank, I recalled, to which he had referred me.

"Do you expect," I said presently, "that he will return? We were influenced to come here, which is a little out of our way, because we understood that he was here. We are visitors in Boston from his home town," I added at a venture.

"He told me not to keep the rooms for him," Mrs. Raymond answered hesitatingly.

I searched the room eagerly with my eyes as we talked, hoping to find a piece of paper or some other bit overlooked by the recent tenant which would help us. But apparently he had been cautious to leave absolutely nothing behind, and we took our leave presently without having gained very much through our ruse, or, I regret to say,

without having in any way enriched the accommodating Mrs. Raymond.

I was inexpressibly chagrined and correspondingly disappointed that I had permitted Mr. Summerfield again to slip through my fingers. I began to have an uncomfortable feeling that he was too clever for me, and it put me upon my keenest mettle.

It was evident that the old fellow had divined that we were again upon his scent, hence his hasty departure from his comfortable quarters with Mrs. Raymond, and, logically, he would leave town this time, but — for where?

As soon as we were away from Mrs. Raymond I asked Milbrath to go to the North Station and watch for Summerfield at the entrance to the trains, follow him if he saw him and telegraph me where to join him. Then I telephoned to the Pingree Agency and had men detailed immediately for a similar purpose at the other stations. I went myself to the Park Square Station, where, only the day before, we had abandoned a watch.

I left instructions to deliver at once any message that might come for me, and then I made the acquaintance of the gateman and adroitly put a few questions. I did not speak of Summerfield's rounded shoulders, for I began to surmise that, like his handwriting, they were assumed. But so far as the gateman could recall no elderly man at all like Mr. Summerfield had passed that way during the past hour and a half — which was one of the quietest periods in the day at that station.

About eleven o'clock a boy brought me this telegram:

Have the old gentleman in sight. Will keep you informed by wire to Parker House.

BRIDGEMAN.

In less time than it takes to write it I was out of the Park Square Station, in a herdic, and on my way to pick up Milbrath and together we returned to the hotel. What Bridgeman could be thinking of to leave us for six hours without news after that I could not, at the time, imagine. But from noon until nearly six o'clock we tried to kill time in the lobby and café of the Parker House. At last, when I think we could have waited no longer, a telegram was handed to me. It contained but one sentence:

Chequomegan House, Lyndeth, Mass., on North Shore.

BRIDGEMAN.

"How in the —— Well, how do you get to Lyndeth, anyway?" I asked Milbrath.

"Give it up," he answered. "Here, perhaps the clerk may know."

Fortunately the clerk at the desk knew, and with the additional assistance of a railway map, a time-table, a cab, a railroad and perhaps a few other accessories, we found ourselves in Lyndeth just as the last streaks of daylight were saying good night to the rock-bound shore.

A bus, boldly lettered, "Chequomegan House,"

was backed up with invitingly opened door against the covered platform of the station, and into it we stepped — the only passengers — and presently we were rumbling over hard and level roads so white in the evening light as to look as if made of sea sand.

Lyndeth is a tree-cloistered suburb of a great manufacturing center, and the two hotels — quiet summer hostelrys — stood almost side by side among the trees a hundred feet, or more, from the edge of the rocky bluff that forms the ocean frontage. A little to the north a smooth, white beach reaches townward; to the south a finger of land juts into the ocean and upholds the beacon light which, with the rolling bell-buoy just below, for years has warned the passing seamen of the dangers of that shore.

Bridgeman proved to be the detective who had called upon us in the morning. He stood on the steps of the Chequomegan House as we drove up.

"He's in there," he said respectfully, with a jerk of his thumb backward, as we stepped upon the veranda.

"What name?"

"La Cour. Richard La Cour."

"From where?"

"From Paris, France, he has registered."

"And you?"

"I'm registered also. Room opposite his. Told the clerk the old fellow was irresponsible and I was following quietly."

"Good!"

I drew Milbrath to one side.

"I shall stand by my promise not to bring him to public notice without your consent," I said, "but if he endeavors to outwit us again before we have the truth from his lips, you are willing, I hope, that Bridgeman should follow him?"

"Oh yes; no doubt that would be best. We must have his story."

"Then I will instruct Bridgeman," and I turned to the detective.

"We mean to see this Mr. La Cour before we leave here," I said. "We have no warrant for his arrest, and, probably, shall make no effort to detain him, but we don't want him, by any chance, to give us the slip before we have talked with him. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Then we shall leave him in your hands. We shall register and go to our rooms and later will communicate with you. Have you managed to dine?"

"Not yet, sir. Men of my profession can do with very little when need be."

"Better order something to your room, nevertheless, and make an excuse to keep your door open, even if you see Mr. Milbrath and myself go into the old man's room."

"Yes, sir."

Milbrath and I registered, and were assigned to adjoining rooms on the second floor, at the other end of the hall, I soon found, from the ones occupied by Bridgeman and his man.

Before the call boy left us I instructed him to take the envelope that I gave him to Mr. La Cour and to await an answer. The envelope, which was sealed and addressed, contained both Milbrath's card and mine, and on the paper which enfolded them I had penciled:

MR. SOMHERS: We are here to know the truth, and we shall follow you now until we see you face to face and learn from your lips the reason for this melodrama.

It is Mr. Milbrath's expressed wish that you shall not be punished for the great wrong you have done him, or for that other wrong for which you must answer at another than an earthly tribunal. But we must talk man to man, and find a way not only to clear your nephew's name from the dishonor which, under present conditions, must always be associated with it, but a way to clear Horsford, who is charged with the murder of Arms.

ELMER BLISS.

It was ten minutes before the boy was back. He handed me a letter which was not only sealed in its envelope of lined linen paper, but sealed, as well, with wax. It was addressed to me, and was as follows:

MR. BLISS: Pray grant me to-night's rest before I meet you. I am worn out both nervously and physically, and there is a statement begun in writing which I must finish before we can discuss the matters to which you have referred. At whatever hour you may name you may come to me in the morning. I shall not try to evade you this time. I have no desire to do so;

but if I had, the man in the room across the hall would doubtless restrain me. I observed him on the train to-day, but did not suspect at the time that he was your agent.

P. S.

I handed this note to Milbrath. There was no disguise in the handwriting this time. It was bold and upright, though it betrayed evidence of bodily weakness or great mental perturbation.

Milbrath read it through like a man in a dream, and then he leaned his head back on the high back of the chair in which he sat and closed his eyes.

The boy, whom I had forgotten, was regarding first one and then the other of us with quick eyes that bulged with curiosity. I dismissed him and walked down the hall behind him to Bridgeman's room.

"We shall have to make an all night watch of it," I said briefly. "Can you rest now and let me take your place until two o'clock?"

Bridgeman's face betrayed no surprise. I dare say he was accustomed to the unexpected in pretty nearly every form.

"I could, no doubt, sir; but, if you will pardon me, it is wholly unnecessary, unless you have a special wish to be here. I am frequently on duty all night as well as all day, and of late it has been all night instead of all day."

"It is hard to tell what to-morrow may bring forth. You may regret it if you do not sleep to-night."

Bridgeman shook his head with a smile.

"I'll take that risk, sir," he said. "And, if

you will excuse me, I think I might say that it is you who are in need of rest."

When I came to think of it I felt that Bridgeman was right. The day of idle suspense had been as hard for me as two days of action. I decided to get a good night's rest if I could.

In the night some time I awakened suddenly from what seemed to be a dreamless sleep with that curious tightness of the heartstrings which I had experienced in coming out of a nightmare. My first thought was that something unusual was happening near me; that there were voices in the air. But a moment's silent attention convinced me that my impression was merely the effect of a dream that I did not recall, and I settled back among the pillows to sleep again.

But I had been too thoroughly roused to sleep at once, and I found that I was beset by a curious apprehensiveness which, inasmuch as I could find no reason for it, I tried to shake off as fanciful and old womanish. But it would not leave me, and, presently, with an irritated conviction that I might as well put on petticoats and trailed skirts, and admit myself a creature of nerves, I rose and lighted the gas.

Then I knew what ailed me. I had old Sombers on my mind, and was harassed with a fear that after all he was going to give us the slip again somehow. The logical course for him now was to put a bullet in his brains, and end the melodrama—for him, yes; but Milbrath? What if, after all, Milbrath must go on to the end of his days

without the vindication that was his right — go on as he was going or denounce his uncle? He would carry his dishonor to his grave, then, I felt sure. I wondered that I had not thought of the possibility of such an end to our pursuit, and I anathematized myself again and again for my lack of foresight and my laxness in not insisting upon an interview with Somhers on the previous evening.

I found "Black Beauty" in my bag, and lighted it. A few puffs put me on a better footing with myself and the world.

Outside, a September gale howled like a delighted banshee, and hurtled the rain in wide slaps against the window panes. I lowered the gas and pulled up the shade before one of the drenched windows. The trees on the lawn about the house glistened in the light of the city lamps, which were still burning, and bent and shook in the face of the wind. Beyond the row of lamps that marked the edge of the bluff I could not see, but the roar of the surf as it pounded unceasingly against the rocks hinted of the seething waters a little farther out.

Once or twice it seemed to me I caught a glimpse of figures, moving about on the bluff, but I decided it to be another evidence of my still unsteady nerves.

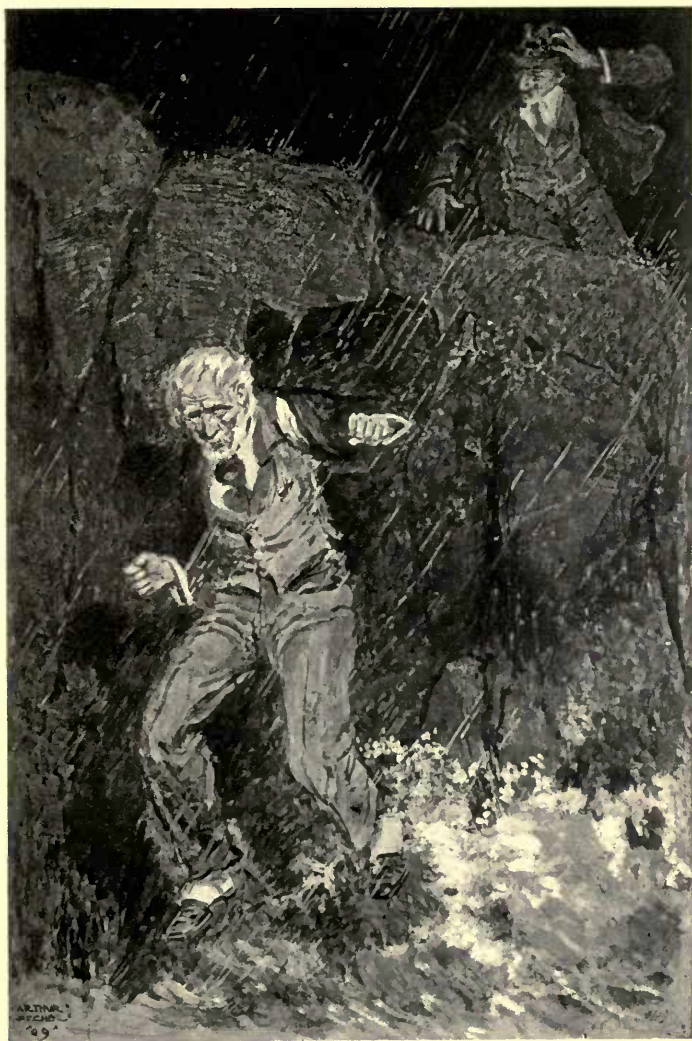
After a time I returned to bed, and toward dawn I again slept.

Soon after seven o'clock Milbrath tapped at my door. He looked refreshed, and said that after midnight he had rested well. I had just finished dressing, so we left the room together.

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As our door closed behind us Bridgeman stepped from his room and came toward us. He had brushed and shaved and freshened his appearance with a change of linen, but his face was pale and anxious.

"I'm sorry to report it, sirs," he said, glancing from one to the other of us a little nervously, "but the old gentleman, Mr. La Cour, went over the cliff in the night."



"Mr. La Cour went over the cliff in the night."

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CHAPTER XXXVI

"THE WAGES OF SIN"

MILBRATH staggered forward a step and then swayed toward me. I thought that he had swooned, but he caught himself against a wall and revived at once.

"What is that you said?" he cried sharply, "Mr. La Cour dead?"

Bridgeman nodded, and motioned us into his room and closed the door.

"Will you have chairs and hear about it now, or will you breakfast first?" he asked.

We seated ourselves without a word. The memory of my midnight fears assailed me with a pang so poignant that for the moment I was speechless.

"It was about one o'clock when the old man opened his door suddenly and looked out," began Bridgeman. "He saw me in here, and came across the hall and directly into this room in a quick, nervous way as if he was quite used up and at the end of his tether. He had a package of papers in one hand. This is it."

Bridgeman went to a bureau and took a small parcel from a locked drawer and held it out uncertainly. Milbrath made no move to take it, and I stretched forth my hand.

"Yes," I said mechanically. "Go on, Bridgeman."

He thrust the papers before me.

" 'Take these, man,' he said. 'But as you value the welfare of your soul, let them get into the hands of no one but Harrison Milbrath or young Bliss.' Those were his exact words. Before I could speak he was halfway back to his room again. I never saw such a spry man for one of his years! I heard the key turn in the lock of his door, and then, for a little time afterward, there was quiet in the house. Then I heard a window opened somewhere. I can't say why the sound did n't seem right to me, for it is natural enough to want air in your room at night, and I was not sure the sound came from across the hall. But I did n't like it for some reason, and I crept across to the hall window. What should I see but the old man, bare-headed, out in the downpour, going down the rain pipe off the porch just before my eyes. He saw me, too, and gave a low cry. I was out of that window and down the rain pipe almost as quick as he was, and off in the direction he went. But I could n't catch him. I shouted to him to be careful of the cliff, but I knew that he knew about it as well as I did, for he walked out along there after we arrived in the afternoon. I guess that's about all there is to tell, sirs. The night watchman heard us and came out, too, but we could n't catch him, as I said, and then —— Well, we waited for the tide to come in —— and it floated in with it —— the body, sirs."

So those were the figures that I fancied I saw moving among the dripping tree branches as I stood by the window.

"Are there many in the house who know about this, Bridgeman?" I asked.

"Not yet, sir. There are few guests in the house, for the season has ended, you know. Only the watchman, the landlord, and the servants knew it an hour ago when I came up; but the coroner from town will be here soon."

Bridgeman hesitated. Then he went to the door and looked up and down the hall.

"I'm not supposed to know, but perhaps it is best for you to be prepared for anything. There was an envelope in the old man's room that the landlord found and took in keeping for the coroner, and it was addressed to 'Mr. Elmer Bliss'—and the coroner will be here soon," repeated Bridgeman significantly.

I saw the point. We must be prepared for anything the coroner might ask us. Must we speak the whole truth, or would that little bundle of papers tell a tale that would help us?

"Thank you, Bridgeman," I said. "You will say nothing about these papers at the inquest, of course."

"Of course not, sir. Depend upon me."

Milbrath, who had not uttered a word during Bridgeman's story, followed me out of the room and back to our own like a mute. This hour was marking an epoch in his life, and from the expression of his whole figure I knew that he was living through it by sheer force of will.

"We must see the contents of this parcel and take our cue from here," I cried, as soon as we were alone behind closed doors. And silently I prayed that we should find a loophole that would let one name come through restored, and the other pass on untarnished.

In the parcel there were, perhaps, a dozen sheets caught together with a manuscript pin. But a loose sheet on top was in fresh ink, and to it I first turned my attention.

With Milbrath looking over my shoulder I read:

To Elmer Bliss, and to my nephew, Harrison Milbrath:

The time is here that I have known from the first must come sooner or later, for the lassoeer cannot play the game that I have played and not himself be caught in the noose at last.

Nevertheless, I am satisfied that it is as it is. I am an old man, as deeds as well as years go, and I have caused, no doubt, more than my share of earth's worries. But, in this evening that you have granted me, the last that I shall know, I shall make what restitution I can at this late day for my greatest error, the culmination of all my folly, for which God alone knows the price I have paid.

There will be a note addressed to you, Mr. Bliss, waiting for you on this desk where I am writing, when you come to see me in the morning. It is a "confession," the worth of which you may appreciate when you have read it. This note and a *true* statement of my case I shall hand to your agent across the hall, to be given to you when I am past the power of doing so. It is a bit of biography — a statement of conditions that no

one now on earth ever knew to exist, and I beg you to destroy it as soon as you have read it.

I do not seek commiseration — I who must lie in a murderer's grave — but I think that even he who has reason never to forgive may think less harshly of me when he knows all.

As for you, Elmer Bliss, I can but compliment you upon your success. You are a worthy son of a noble father. You did your duty, even toward me who deserved no consideration, and as a last favor I ask you to deposit to your account, as soon as possible, the check for \$20,000 made to you and lying in trust in the Garfield Bank.

As I have said once before in a letter which you may not have credited, and as I have just said again in the public note to you lying here, I did not kill James Arms. Much as he deserved it I am thankful that I can go out as I should go, like a burned candle, without that extra crime upon my soul.

And now? Now I am Richard La Cour. Remember only that, please — Richard La Cour, homeless, friendless, without means, the slayer of Peter Somhers. The "estimable Peter Somhers!" For God's sake never let the truth be known. I beg it. I who have never begged before — little as I deserve consideration — I beg it! I who must pay the penalty for my evil in a murderer's grave away from Adelaide and little Roland! A murderer's grave for all eternity!

There was no signature.

"It is not probable that we shall be held or searched," I said, breaking the tense silence that prevailed as I finished reading. "But we must be prepared for anything and we must hide these papers for the present where they are not likely to be

found. Here, lend a hand and we'll rip up the carpet and spread the papers out under it and beneath the bed. There's no time to read the others now."

Noiselessly as possible we moved the bedstead, and with our knives removed the tacks and laid the papers under the carpet. Then as quietly we replaced the tacks and moved the bedstead back.

And still, without an exchange of words, but by tacit agreement, we left the room together.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MILBRATH'S VINDICATION

I SUPPOSE that we breakfasted that morning, and I dare say we behaved, answered questions, and did what we had to do much as other people similarly conditioned would have done, but I recollect only one detail — the expression of peace that rested at last on the features of the old man who had fled from us as we slept to make his plea for leniency in the court of last resort.

Much more clearly in my memory stand out the events of that other morning a week later when Milbrath, having quietly taken it in charge, we laid the body of "Richard La Cour" to rest as near as possible to the grave of little Roland and that of "Adelaide, beloved wife of Peter Somhers," in peaceful Mt. Auburn.

I know that at eleven o'clock Milbrath and I, answering a summons, found ourselves in a coroner's court in the city to the north of Lyndeth.

The coroner was a man past middle life, with a face that showed that he had not been insensible to the miseries encountered in following his profession.

"Mr. Elmer Bliss?" he inquired, looking at me.

I bowed.

"There is a communication here, addressed by the dead man, presumably, to you. May I ask you to open it and read it aloud to these gentlemen?"

The letter was as follows:

MR. ELMER BLISS,

SIR: I am aware that you are the man who has hounded me for weeks, and, necessarily, I am aware why you have done it. But I will cheat the gallows. I am an old man and it matters little when I go, but the way of going I shall choose.

But first:

I wish to depose and say that I, Richard La Cour, a man without a home, relatives, near friends, or, at the present time, means or effects save what I carry with me, and a small amount in the First National Bank in the city of Boston, am responsible, and alone responsible, for the death of Peter Somhers, of Overlook, in Winton, state of —, on October twelfth, two years ago.

On that fateful day I joined Mr. Somhers upon his request at his place in Winton, to conclude a business arrangement which we had considered. I was admitted by him through a side door and no one, save Mr. Somhers, knew of my presence there. A quarrel arose, and in a moment of anger I suppose that I struck Mr. Somhers. He fell to the floor, and the bruises that he sustained resulted in his speedy death. I left the house unseen after nightfall and went directly to Boston. Since then, until the past few months, I have spent most of the time in seclusion or abroad.

I wish, also, to depose and say that James Arms, late farmer of Overlook, having come into possession of

my secret, kept me reminded of my indebtedness to his silence, and in that way became, by degrees, the possessor of nearly all that I could call my own in this world's goods. On the day of his death he threatened me not only with exposure, but with death if I did not give him the sum of money that he demanded. High words followed on both sides, and Arms stumbled on a chair, and by accident, I suppose, discharged into his own body a bullet that was doubtless intended for me.

This confession I make of my own free will to exonerate Harrison Milbrath, who was twice tried for the crime that I committed, and to free the man Horsford who is charged with having killed James Arms.

(Signed)

RICHARD LA COUR."

A stir of astonishment vibrated through the room. There were present those who recalled the sensational trials of Harrison Milbrath.

"May I ask you, Mr. Bliss, to give the jury a statement of your acquaintance with the signer of this confession?" It was the grave, kindly voice of the coroner who spoke.

My ears were buzzing with excitement, my brain in a whirl as to how I could speak without perjury, yet without betraying the secret that was now mine to keep. Then I found myself saying:

"I have no acquaintance with this Mr. La Cour. I was engaged as a private investigator of the Somhers mystery by my friend, Mr. Milbrath, and came upon a clue which I followed — to this end."

"Can you tell us some of the details?" asked one of the jurors, a round-eyed, expectant-looking little man.

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"Is that compulsory?" I asked with a smile. "A professional man in my capacity does not enjoy parting with the secret of his success."

The coroner deliberated.

"You are at liberty to say as much or as little as you like on that point," he answered presently.

"Then I will say, merely, that the first hint that I got of Mr. La Cour was in investigating a clue which the police saw fit to drop as worthless — the statement of a driver named Jardine Jandyce of Beverly who drove an elderly man to Overlook on the day of the crime."

Another ripple of astonishment ran through the room, and some one in the rear caused a smile by his hearty recommendation to "Shoot the police!"

I dreaded to have Milbrath called; but his examination was brief and of such a nature as to permit him to answer in monosyllables. His extreme paleness and agitation seemed natural enough to a group of curious men who saw in him only the wronged principal in a hard-fought battle for his life. But the coroner remarked to him, as he asked to leave the room after his examination:

"You have been under a severe mental strain, my young man. Permit me, as a physician, to advise you to take absolute rest now."

I resolved on the spot to engage Bridgeman as leading man if ever I organized a theatrical company. He made a fine show of telling a great deal, but not a word did he let fall of those features of his case that might further involve Milbrath or me.

The few other witnesses called had nothing to say that complicated the case, and after a brief consultation with his men, the coroner decided to conclude his work at once, and almost immediately the jury rendered a verdict of "Suicide by drowning when upon the point of being taken for the murder of Peter Somhers, late of Winton" etc.

Of course the afternoon papers were full of the story, the headlines of many of them appearing in pyramids of descending type that referred to the Somhers' mystery and its ultimate solution. I found myself regarded somewhat in the light of a Sherlock Holmes; and, so unreliable is public opinion, Milbrath came in not only for sympathy but for praise!

We spent the greater part of the afternoon in receiving reporters; for as I was one of them in spirit, I had not the heart to deny them a good story.

My own story of the case I reserved for the New York *Sphere*, and that was meager in sensation compared with the whole truth — had I been able to give it to the public then.

It was nearly six o'clock when Milbrath and I found ourselves alone at last in our rooms at the Chequamegon House. We had sent Bridgeman home on the midday train, his pockets well lined with greenbacks which Milbrath insisted that he should accept from him.

Milbrath looked so exhausted that I hesitated to recall the papers that lay hidden beneath the carpet. But he had not forgotten them, and presently he

pulled aside the bedstead and began to loosen the carpet.

"We might as well know the whole truth at once," he said. "But, my God, Bliss! At what a cost my good name has been bought!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE STORY TOLD

“IT is nearly a year now since Philander Summerfield met death at my hands, and, as my nephew, Harrison Milbrath, is still held for the crime, I am constrained to put upon paper a full and truthful account of the circumstances of the case, and of those that led up to it. For if Harry is again condemned to die, and no loophole of escape is made for him otherwise, I must let the truth be known to the world. But it shall be only upon my own death.

“The beginning of conditions that culminated last year in a tragedy was as far back as '79 when I lost little Roland, my seven-years-old son. No one who has not been similarly placed can understand my grief at that time, for his mother and he were the only persons on earth whom I had ever loved.

“As a boy I was known as imaginative, clever, adaptable, but never as lovable or affectionate. As a man I lived through many years of bachelorhood without once feeling my heart warm or grow tender for any of the comely maidens about me, many of whom, no doubt, would have been glad, or willing, at least, to become Mrs. Somhers for the sake of the social position which my family held, and for

the wealth to which I was heir, if not for love of the young man who was I.

“Finally, in my fortieth year I met Adelaide, and for the first time knew the meaning of the grand passion. We were married twelve months after our first meeting, and, in the following year, little Roland came. To him I was cold at first, for had not his life almost cost that of my beloved Adelaide? But with his first lisping ‘Dadda’ my heart was won, and from that hour all that I cared for in life was held in two frail forms.

“With Roland’s death, then, there came an apathy, an indifference to everything for a time, and then — reaction.

“We were stopping for the summer at the Ocean Hotel in Newport, and among the guests was one who laid claim to being a spiritualistic medium. I believed in her at the time, but now I know that she was a humbug who played upon the credulity of poor, earthtied worms such as I.

“Adelaide encouraged my interest in the woman’s claims for she thought she saw in it an awakening for me, though in looking back upon that time I think that she was less credulous than I.

“Well, that was the beginning. In the next few years I spent thousands of dollars upon mediums who gave me communications from my boy. Then, suddenly, that structure gave way, for I detected a medium in fraud.

“I had given in to a partial reconciliation to our loss and I saw how I had been deluded from the first. But in those years I had become a rest-

less man with a craving for the new and exciting, and nothing satisfied me for long.

“Then Adelaide died — quite unexpectedly after a day’s illness, and from the hour of her death for six weeks I was a maniac in the grip of delirium.

“As soon as I was strong enough to be about again, I was seized with a desire to travel, and it was upon my first trip after that that I met Mr. and Mrs. Bliss and their young son. There was something about that lad that appealed to me. He was not like my Roland, yet there was in him a suggestion of the same temperament.

“Very different was Harrison Milbrath, my only sister’s child, whom I took to live with me when he became an orphan some years later. Harry’s incessant boyish garrulity, his hilarity, his irresponsibility irritated me continually. I compared him perpetually with Roland, and asked myself over and over what justice there was in a Higher Power that would take away from parents who waited upon his very breathing, such a boy as Roland and leave a lad like Harry, whom there were none left to love. I never felt affection for the boy, as I have shown, but by constantly comparing him with my Roland, I learned to hate him. Yes; hate is the word.

“I had grown irritable with age, and I found satisfaction at times in making Harry suffer. To such a degree can we influence the mind that after a time the very sight of the boy roused a demon within me — a force which could be excited by no other person with whom I came in contact, or ever had.

“About the time that Harry was left to me I wearied of constant travel, and having bought Overlook several years previously I settled down in Winton, leaving there only when the demon of unrest again got me in his grip for a time.

“Thus the years went on up to 18—, when Harry entered Harvard. Then I found, and to my astonishment, that the habit of breaking into paroxysms of fury had become fixed, and with Harry away I had no safe vent. I dared not treat another as I had treated him; and more, I had a certain pride in being regarded as a quiet man, mild and genial except when irritated to the limit of human endurance by the wilfulness of my nephew. For I was willing enough in those days to have Harry bear the brunt of my wickedness — Harry who was amiable and lovable, I see now. If only I could have seen it then!

“From my earliest manhood I had been interested in the philosophical, the psychological. My own case became a study to me, therefore, and I calmly traced my mania — for it was nothing less — from its incipency. I was convinced that I could control myself, and I made an effort.

“Then I discovered a curious thing. My dual self loved those exhibitions of the baser man! It gloried in them! And it had gained the mastery!

“My outbursts, I found, were in the nature of a seizure. There were premonitory symptoms, and when these appeared I endeavored for a time to ward off the attack by an effort of will. But I was as if under the control of another, and there

were hours that I spent locked in my study, when I would lash myself into such a fury that I am certain that had any one appeared before me I should have killed him with pleasure.

“To guard against such an exigency I forbade any servant even to tap upon my library door when it was closed. If a caller came, but that was rare, he must wait until the door were opened, or come again. As I was never irritable with the servants or townspeople, I think that what went on behind that closed door was never suspected.

“But, after a time, it became annoying always to have the door of my workroom open when I was not a maniac, and I conceived the notion of a hidden room to which I could retire when I felt that my evil genius was in the ascendancy.

“Then came the idea of a passage to the gardens, where I could get air after my attacks. For by this time my paroxysms of insanity had grown into periods which could be brought to an end only by a dose of chloral (which, fortunately, I always had reason enough left to take), and a sleep from which I would awaken with restored mind but with body utterly exhausted. A walk in the air was the only thing that made me myself again, and for this reason I wanted a concealed way from the library to the gardens.

“I made the necessary plans, therefore, and hired workmen from Boston, who went back and forth each day between Winton and Lewis Junction, for I could not risk their wagging tongues in Winton or Beverly, even though I had engaged each

man at quadruple his usual wages only upon a solemn oath that he would keep the secret of the character of the work, no matter what happened, throughout his life.

“I directed the work and kept away visitors during its progress. My nephew was in Europe that summer, and I had less difficulty in keeping my secret than one would suppose. On one occasion, however, some neighboring townspeople came up to the grounds of an evening, and, for the first time before any one but Harry, I gave vent to a demoniacal irritation. I raved, but, fortunately, with mildness compared to my usual attacks of mania. Nevertheless I think that I roused suspicion as to my sanity. I certainly lost my reputation for being a man of a mild temper.

“About that time there appeared that remarkable bit of fiction entitled ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.’ The tale appealed to me as nothing in fiction ever before had done. I read it over and over until I knew it so nearly by heart that to this day I can repeat much of it word for word.

“Much as my better self loathed the character of Hyde, the dual man of me was fascinated by it. The one side of me gloated over the realization that I, too, was of the same kind; the other side regarded the fact with horror.

“How much of my conduct was due — is due — to the use of chloral, and how much is a psychological ultimate — as in the case of Hyde — to yielding to my baser nature, I am not prepared to say, for since I began the use of the drug I have

never been able to drop it — save for a short period only, of which I shall write later, but about which I am now able to recount but little.

“The animal in me gained no predominance, owing, perhaps, to my advanced age; for I was then past sixty.

“My worst evil lay in my desire to do bodily harm, and in my sane moments I became haunted by a fear that some time I would break from the secret room (where after its completion I secluded myself during these seizures), and attack some unoffending person — as did Hyde. When I was in part my better self I still gloated with horrible pleasure over the thought that I was deceiving all who knew me as to my true character.

“My idea of having another to masquerade as I grew out of this feeling — out of the fear, rather, that I would some time injure some one — and my better nature, which ordinarily disapproved all that my dual self suggested, approved this plan. She (to my imagination my better side was feminine), argued that while some one was living at Overlook as Peter Somhers, respectable and respected, the real Peter Somhers would be in some far distant land conquering the evil in him. She told me that the good Peter Somhers would prevail under the right influence, and money could buy that influence. And, strange to relate, I looked with pleasure upon being once more the self of my early manhood days.

“With the end in view of leaving Overlook for an indefinite period in the hands of a substitute (though the notion that I needed a substitute to

permit me to leave was purely fanciful and an evidence of my love of deception), I began to look about for a man who resembled me in physical appearance.

“After nearly a year’s search in all parts of the country, I came, at last, upon Philander Summerfield, whose initials, even, were mine, and his name similar. He was a former teacher, and ‘down on his luck,’ as the saying goes. He answered nearly every point in my requirements. In height, coloring, and shape of features he was like me. His shoulders bent a trifle, but I reasoned that I could appear to stoop a little when in the presence of others, so that feature would become recognized in me before I turned over my reins to him. His voice was lighter and his manner of speech slower than mine, but he was an apt pupil and soon imitated me to perfection. His eyelids were different, a trifle heavier, and his eyes were dreamier than mine. But I knew that by a judicious use of coloring matters I could change my own lids so as to make that feature also familiar.

“As for the rest, he was absolutely without relatives — a rare condition and one important for my work, as I wanted the man who impersonated me to have no communication whatever with his past life.

“Being practically penniless, a would-be suicide with Potter’s Field in the background, he was easy for me to secure. Indeed, he looked upon the matter as a huge joke, worthy of a place in fiction. The small fortune which I agreed to pay him in con-

sideration of his services faithfully rendered, appeared to his eyes like a princely remuneration.

"I had him call upon a number of my acquaintances, having first primed him in everything that he needed to know about me, and the acquaintances were utterly deluded. On several occasions he impersonated me in business transactions — always with success. Then we sat for photographs, which came out precisely alike except for the difference in the eyelids, for the camera refused to recognize the make-up of mine.

"Finally we agreed upon a day when he should arrive at Overlook to begin the masquerade. He came, unknown to any of my household, but I had been seized with a whimsical desire to delay my departure for a time and he was obliged to return to town again. He went to the Beverly station, and I remember that people later spoke of having seen me starting for New York on that day.

"About two weeks later I wrote Summerfield to come again, and he came, letting himself in through the grotto door, for I had initiated him into the mysteries of my house.

"As misfortune would have it, I was in a rage at the moment of his arrival.

"For a number of months past I had been (unnecessarily) annoyed by Harry's attentions to the granddaughter of my only close friend — a young girl whom I had known from her early girlhood, and with whom Harry had associated during the whole period of his residence in Winton. But things were different when I knew that he purposed to

marry her, and it enraged me to think that he dared to marry any one without my consent — he a dependent still!

“Yet my better nature knew that it was my fault that Harry remained financially dependent upon me. At various times since the close of his college life he had declared earnestly that he wished to strike out for himself, and I would taunt him furiously for not doing so. But I knew that there was nothing in Winton or in Beverly for a man of his position and training. Moreover, in spite of the hatred I believed that I still felt for the boy I could not bring myself (when he was not before me) to the thought of parting with him. Hence, as regularly as he declared that he would leave me, just so regularly would I write a note which I left at his place at the table or upon the dresser in his room, imploring him to forgive me and remain with me.

“But on this day, the 12th of October, when Philander Summerfield arrived in Winton for the second time, my customary quarrel with Harry had resulted in his immediate departure. He returned to the house soon after noon and I alone saw him enter. When, therefore, I saw him leave the house again, this time carrying a suitcase, I knew that he had been to his room and must have seen the note that I had left there for him. So I crept up there with a feeling that he had left an answer, a feeling that was confirmed, though never before had I known him to answer me as he did that day.

“On the blank side of the paper which bore my note to him he had written :

“ ‘ I have listened to your pleadings in the past only to find that you were playing with me. As I told you this morning, when I have accomplished something of which you may be proud — if that time ever comes — I will return to Overlook and to you.

“ ‘ Until then, accept my thanks for having given me the education with which to face the world.’

“No words can describe the intensity of my passion as I read those words. My first thought was to dash myself from the bluff; my second to live and make Harry suffer. How, I did not at the moment know, but suffer he should!

“Just as I returned to my secret room Philander Summerfield arrived.

“I have mentioned that I always feared a human presence at the time of one of these seizures, and here was Summerfield!

“As it happened, my attacks had been milder for a few months, perhaps because Harry acted as a sort of safety valve. At all events, my quarrel with him that day had spent my passion to such an extent that on sight of Summerfield my better self was able to assert herself for a time, and we transacted some final business connected with the impersonation that he was about to begin.

“Suddenly, however, I felt the demon in me again rising to the surface. I implored Summerfield to leave the room, but either he misunderstood me or thought by remaining to help me some-

how — for he did not know the creature I became at times.

“ I do not know what happened next. All I recollect is that I reached for a bottle of chloral and then — Perhaps I struck him and he fell; it may be that we wrestled and I threw him; or I may have tripped him as he came to me. I do not know. But there he lay, I saw presently, the blood from a wound in his temple spurting over the floor. Even to-day you can see the stain of that blood on the carpet and the floor of the secret room if you will move the rug that I threw over it.

“ This unexpected turn of affairs sobered me instantly. My better self returned with a shock of horror. What had I done? That which I had most feared would happen some time. I had taken a human life, for Summerfield was quite dead when I bent over him and tried to find his pulse. And more, I had killed the very one who, because of his striking resemblance to me, I believed the one to help me defeat the evil of my dual self.

“ Then the gravity of my deed from a legal outlook bore in upon my mind. I, Peter Somhers, to die on the gallows or stand trial, even, for having taken a life? Never! I would dispose of the body of my victim and go on with life as before. Who was there to question where Philander Summerfield had gone? Who so much as to dream that Peter Somhers was a murderer?

“ But the devil in me was whispering again: ‘Change your identity,’ it said. ‘Be Philander Summerfield, and with your new name, take upon

yourself a new way of thinking and of living. Who is to prove that you are not he? Leave that stiffening body there to be called Peter Somhers, and to the mould of the grave; and listen! Here is your opportunity to revenge yourself upon Harry — to make him suffer as you want to see him suffer; for who but Harrison Milbrath would kill Peter Somhers?’

“Needless to say, I yielded to the demon. Within half an hour I had dragged the body of Philander Summerfield to the couch in the library, and had transferred my signet ring to his cold finger. I did not realize that I had brought that piece of oilcloth from the secret room and put it beneath his head. I did not know it until I read, long afterward, that it was found there. And then I laughed. Yes; *laughed!*

“By that time the chloral that I had taken began to take effect upon my system, and in the seclusion of the secret room I slept for hours.

“When I awoke there were sounds of excitement in the library; for the body had been found.

“I had meant to get away before that event, and I worked myself into an ecstasy of terror lest I be discovered when I tried to leave the place.

“For nearly a fortnight I remained in the little room, making my plans for the immediate future, endeavoring (fool that I was) to imitate the handwriting of Philander Summerfield, and playing solitaire night and day, night and day. Of the past I dared not think, into the future I could take but one glance. But it is of interest to record that not

once in those two weeks did a paroxysm of mania come upon me.

"I subsisted on what I could poach from the larder in the dead of night, for I dared not venture out upon the roads at that time, when every stranger was under suspicion. My beard grew, and in it I found an extraordinary disguise. When I reached Boston I breathed freely for the first time in two weeks.

"My first act as a free man (oh, the humor of Fate!) was to enter a private asylum for the insane.

"‘To argue one’s self mad is to prove one’s self sane,’ the head physician told me when I applied for treatment. But before I had been long with him I think he may have strengthened his axiom by the addition of the adverb ‘sometimes.’

"For days at a time, after they took the chloral from me, I remained a raving maniac, and for a long time afterward I was too exhausted to think much of my past or care whether I lived or died.

"After a time, however, those phases of my disorder passed, and I found myself slowly gaining strength, both in mind and body.

"For nearly a year as Albert Emerson (a name that I had assumed when I was looking for a man to impersonate me) I remained under the protecting roof of the sanitarium caring little, or nothing, for what was going on in the world outside. Then, one day, there came a desire to know how the death of Peter Somhers had been received, and what had become of Harry.

"I gained my release, and came back six weeks ago into the rush and distraction of life.

"Then I read the papers — and what stacks of back numbers I bought! — and through them I learned of Harry's arrest, and eagerly I followed his trial. Eagerly? Yes; but sometimes with a depression too acute for expression.

"Heaven alone knows the mixture of exultation and remorse with which my mind greeted the verdict of his first trial! Fifty times since then I have been on the point of giving my confession into the hands of some trusty person and destroying myself. But each time the demon of egotism has restrained me.

"And now I await another verdict which will mean a continuance of life for the boy, or death in a felon's cap — unless — I save him! After all, considering what I was to him he was a good boy to me. Why should I not save him? Good God! Why do I wish to live! For what do I live — now? I have, indeed, sold my birthright for 'a mess of pottage' which turns to dust and ashes between my lips!

"July 14th. Freed! Harry a free man! And I may still live! For what? Heaven alone knows — but life is sweet.

"July 19th, 18 — (a year later). For a year have I, Philander Summerfield, been traveling and trying to forget. But there is no oblivion for me except in the chloral — for I have gone back to it — to forget!

"A harassing fear haunts me that in a moment of madness I shall betray my secret. Then, again, there is Harry. Poor Harry! Sometimes in the night I awaken with his name upon my lips.

"I am tired of life. I long to exonerate Harry. I must do it, but I cannot give myself up to the police. Never that! A moment's time I must have to prepare things for the end — and then! — I shall engage some one to hunt me down. There will, perhaps, be diversion for me in that; and again, I shall know when it is time to prepare. For a long time I have known who will be my Nemesis, if he will take the case, though as yet I have not learned his name. He is the man who wrote the best thing that I have read in connection with the case — *my* case! I will give him a fortune to get me — if he can. And he will! Others have failed? Yes; but he will not. Ha! ha! What a novelty — to detect one's self! Truly, it is worthy of a madman. For I am still mad. Not in paroxysms as before, but mad.

"Of late I have been possessed of a desire to visit Overlook. It is easy going from the Winton station through the trail that Harry made. Poor Harry! Ah! If only I might speak with you again, face to face! I would be kind now!

"Last week I was discovered by Arms. Curse that man! Of course he knew me. Men of his calibre have one faculty so abnormal as to appear like a gift, and his is a memory for faces and figures, for the expression of face, carriage, body — all the trifling individualities that make up a personality

and are never combined precisely the same in two bodies. He alone of all the world came, years ago, to know my shortcomings; and because of his knowledge I added a codicil in his favor to my will, kept him on at Overlook, and countenanced things that make my blood boil even now to recall.

“But he has me in his power now, and he knows it. I recognize that his ready promise to keep my secret and give me food and shelter at his cottage when I want it, is actuated by no impulse more noble than a fear that if he betrays me I will keep my oath to cut him out of all that he acquired through my supposed death, and, likewise, a desire to get more from me from time to time.

“Last evening as I crept about the grounds of my lovely silent Overlook, I caught a glimpse of Chauncey McClure standing by his own gate. The impulse grew strong in me to go to him and unburden my soul, throwing myself upon his generous protection — for he would never betray me. But, as he looked up in my direction, and I realized that against the sunset’s afterglow my figure was clearly discernible, a spasm of fear gripped me and I dropped to the ground and crawled, snakewise (oh, the degradation of it!), to a place beyond his line of vision. Then I took to my feet and ran, never pausing until within the sheltering walls of Arms’ cottage. Such it is to be an outcast among men!

“August 16th. At last I have gone a step farther. I have engaged that man. And who does he prove to be but the son of John Bliss, that child, grown

to man's estate, who reminded me of my Roland! Ah! The bitter, bitter irony of Fate!

"August 24th. There is no peace upon earth for such as I — no love in all the world. Not long since in my contemptible self-complacency I accepted as my birthright the preferment of my fellow men, too often, nevertheless, secretly scorning their tacit pleas for friendship. Now I would sacrifice all that once seemed to me to be the essence of life: family, culture, education, wealth, for a single tender word from one, however humble, who truly cared for *me*. Sometimes, when the thought of what I have become, carries me beyond all bounds of control, I cry aloud in my agony, terrifying those who hear me, and, aye, striking fear to my own heart, even.

"Last evening I ventured again through the deserted lower rooms at Overlook, and memories of the past and horror of the miserable present grew too great for me to bear. That I shrieked I am aware, but of what directly followed, as in other instances, I have no knowledge. I must have fled to the secret room, for presently I found myself there, cold and shivering with the fear of detection. God have pity on such as I!

"September 14th. Perdition would be rest compared with this life for me. Oh, the torture of it! I, Peter Somhers, hounded from place to place! They are on my track, that young Bliss and Harry. They have discovered the secret room and its contents, which I should have destroyed, and they know now who left those insane warnings. Insane?

Yes; for I hoped through them to gain, after all, a lease on life. But they have proved my undoing — they and that last quarrel with Arms. I did not kill Arms, though. My soul is clean of that stain, if stain it would be to send back to earth that worm of the soil! He had my revolver — my only friend which was to stand by me as Chauncey McClure (ah, yes! *he* is another friend, thank God!) said that one must in time of need, and he had all my money and wanted more. Then he stumbled — And I hid all the day in the woods and at nightfall sought Chauncey McClure. Poor Chauncey McClure! I can see him yet as he looked then — when he knew, and I curse this miserable, selfish life of mine which has brought so much pain and distress into the world! The pity of it! Aye! Strange though it be I can feel pity now for the sufferings of others. Thus, for Harry's sake at last I am willing to pass on by my own deed to my punishment and leave him to the vindication that he deserves. Poor Harry! Yet, if the world knows not of the disgrace to the name of Somhers what need I care? Ah! I fear what may come! The teachings of my childhood return to mock me. And I fear — Fear? What? Nothing in the hereafter can be worse than this life now — and there may be — rest — and — peace — ”

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The clocks in the city to the north of us were striking six as I finished reading. I had been glancing from time to time at Milbrath, whose

face had changed at last from its dull apathy to a picture of expression, now tender, now hardening; and now the tears welled between his eyelids, and he laid his head upon his folded arms upon the table and sobbed aloud.

"Poor uncle!" he muttered. "Poor uncle! After all, he was his own worst enemy, and I have not suffered so much as he!"

I had not the sympathy of kinship which influenced Milbrath, and at that moment I could feel no tenderness for the old villain who had made a trusting young man his scapegoat.

"Come," I said, with my hands upon Milbrath's shoulder. "Let us freshen up a bit and get away from here to-night — into a different atmosphere."

Milbrath made no answer. He sat up with his chin in his hands, his eyes staring straight before him.

"You can't see things in their true lights now, lad," I continued. "Better not try. By and by the perspective will be clearer and you will appreciate not only that we have much to be thankful for that our secret remains ours only, but that no more satisfactory ending was ever realized from so sorry a beginning. Moreover, Milbrath. Think of what complete exoneration means to you. The hour that you have dreamed of and prayed for has come, and you are free to acknowledge as yours the little girl who, to respect your wish, has been denied her right to comfort you these two years, and who is waiting for you there in Winton. Come."

Milbrath rose resolutely and grasped my hand

in a hearty grip. I knew, then, that though only time, that merciful mellower, could soften the memory of recent events and make them endurable to him, yet his brave, sweet character had risen to the demands of the present, and that a beginning had been made.

THE END

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